



VANSLYKE & CURTIS
DRUGGISTS
GOUVERNEUR, N. Y.

DEPARTURE

DEPARTURE

A Novel by
ROLAND DORGELES

Translated by PAULINE E. RUSH



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To
PIERRE MACORLAN



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WE WEIGH ANCHOR

MARSEILLES was gray on the morning of my departure. The pavements glistened so brightly with rain and the clouds were so sombre that it seemed to be the wet streets that were lighting the sky.

Down the Cannebière in the direction of the Vieux-Port come men carrying wreaths, followed by laughing groups of sunburnt women, their arms laden with flowers. As they file along the row of cafés the dropped petals mark their path like the wake of a procession. Every year, on All-Souls' Day, their flowers overflow the landing at the Quai des Belges, where one takes the boat for the Chateau d'If. On this morning, the newspaper kiosk is transformed into a mortuary chapel to which the sailors' widows from the slums of Joliette and Saint-Lazare make pilgrimage as to a cemetery, dragging their children with them. Curious tourists and gossiping old crones gather about to admire the wreaths and spell out the

gilt inscriptions on the ribands: "Deceased . . .
Lost at Sea . . ."

In the afternoon it is the custom to pile all these wreaths and flowers on a little steamer and when the open sea is reached, they are allowed to slip gently into the water for the waves to disperse. A last offering to the sailors who had not come back. . . .

As I drew near, impelled by curiosity, I noticed a well-dressed young man of about thirty who had joined the group on the dock. By the scar on his chin I recognized him as the man who had stood in front of me arguing at the ticket-window of the *Messageries Maritimes*, and I knew that we were to be fellow passengers. His air of gravity intrigued me. As he gazed dreamily at the wreaths, a chrysanthemum fell loose; he picked it up and set it back into place, delicately, as if making a votive offering.

It may have been only this trifling gesture which induced in me a feeling of melancholy. Perhaps this very evening the swift prow of our boat would thrust aside one of these floating wreaths. A strange presentiment! . . . I stood on the threshold of a very long journey with no thought of the book it would one day impel me to write. But already this funereal pier jutting out into the gray sea seemed to shape itself like the frontispiece to the story of my voyaging. . . .

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Lost in reverie, I returned to my waiting carriage and huddled into a corner. Confusedly, as in a dream, I seemed to foresee the unknown man who was to be the hero of that book, a book still without title or subject. I beheld him very pale, dressed in a sort of theatrical costume that I could not clearly define. And there was a scar on his chin.

You embark at the very end of the town, passing miles of storage sheds, swarming roadways, and finally emerging on the busy water-front with its incessant roar of heavy-laden trucks and crowded street cars. Everywhere coal—in mountains, in sacks, and dust heaps. Laboring cranes, screaming whistles, and in the repair docks old cargo boats standing like skeletons, their rusty sheet iron coated with red lead.

My steamer towers over the wharf, like a massive building. Down the gang-plank comes a stream of empty-handed porters, passing those who are going up, their backs bent under their loads. The deck is alive with the stir of departure. Above the heads of the passengers, groaning chains balance huge piles of luggage over the yawning hatch-ways. Bewildered passengers stumble through the corridors:

“C deck, please? . . . C deck. . . ?”

The boat is filling up through every port-hole and

passageway. At the stair landings the harassed crew repeating directions:

“To your right . . . Left . . . One deck up . . . Next deck below. . . .”

The corridors seem too narrow for this continuous stream of passengers, porters, and visitors. Opening doors reveal tiny white cells, miniature rooms whose four walls have suddenly been compressed. How can everything—valises, boxes, bundles, steamer trunks—get in here?

The most sensible thing would be to lie down quietly, or begin unpacking. But this hub-bub, this excitement all about are too magnetic, and I set off to explore.

Families grouped here and there, those who are leaving and those who are remaining behind. Now everything has been said, the last good wishes exchanged, the last promises made. They stand face to face, silent, smiling foolishly at each other. There is nothing more to be done in these few moments, and they are all trembling with the same impatience: to say the last farewell, to see the gang-plank drawn, to have it over with. . . .

Buried in a deep leather arm-chair in the saloon, an old American sits turning the pages of a magazine indifferently. As far as he is concerned, the boat has already left.

His dining room plan before him, the chief steward is making table reservations. Some want places in the center on account of the ship's motion, others wish to be near the port-holes for the sake of the fresh air; but the steward, unruffled by the deluge of requests, continues to make his notations without lifting his head. Favoritism already becomes apparent. The millionaires who are going to India and China insist upon sitting alone. Officials who differ in rank try to avoid being placed next to each other, and I notice a fat, red-faced commander entangled in a group of officers and shouting imperiously:

"Who's the senior in rank here?"

A passenger beside me observes the crowd shrewdly, with a mocking expression at the corner of his mouth. With his checked cap, thin smooth-shaven face, and drooping shoulders, he looks like someone connected with the race-track, a trainer or one of those retired jockeys who may be seen any morning on the streets of Maisons-Laffitte or Chantilly. Without stirring from his place, he calls out over the heads of those in front:

"How about a table for four? I'll see you later. . . ."

The steward recognizes the husky voice. He smiles and raises his head quickly, answering with marked respect:

"I'll see to it, sir."

THE man in the checked cap lights a cigar and disappears. A few minutes later I notice him again on the promenade deck. A seasoned traveler, he has slipped twenty francs into the hand of the deck-steward who immediately brings him the most comfortable steamer-chair, one of those wicker ones that are bought in Singapore. He attaches his visiting card to the chair and then, having nothing else to do, starts off in the direction of the bar.

As soon as his back is turned, I saunter over and read:

DANIEL GARROT

Exchange Broker

Shanghai

The name tells me nothing, the profession even less.

After I have obtained a similar chair from the steward, I stretch out with my cape protecting my knees against the growing chill of the evening, and turn my face towards the port.

DARKNESS falls quickly. Like a stage-setting, the port-holes of the surrounding ships are suddenly flooded with light. A little later, all the huge arc

WE WEIGH ANCHOR

lamps light up together, outlining the sharp edge of the docks and casting innumerable reflections that tremble in the moving water and seem to grope towards the open sea. A patrol boat passes rapidly: one red eye, one green eye. In the distance a lighthouse awakes, flashes a beam, then closes its lid as if going back to sleep.

All at once the engines begin to throb, and the boat trembles throughout its frame. Warned by the gong, the visitors have quitted the ship, and the deck appears suddenly empty as all the passengers line up against the railings. As from a fifth-story window we look down on the thickening crowds below. They push forward to exchange a few last words with those on board, poor useless words into which they throw all their hearts. Some Italians with two mandolins and a violin, playing their native airs as nonchalantly as if they were standing on a Neapolitan street corner, render the departure even more doleful.

The last warning of the gong reverberates from bow to stern. Chains clank, the siren moans. . . . This time it is final: we are weighing anchor. . . .

I can feel no movement, not a tremor or vibration, and it is only by the cry rising from the wharf that I become aware that we have started. Excitedly I

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rush over to starboard. Passengers throng against the side of the ship, all craning their necks for a last glimpse.

The boat itself seems reluctant to depart. It glides slowly and regretfully along the edge of the docks. As we move forward, we seem to separate with difficulty, bit by bit, from the crowd below, like a cloth being torn in two; and soon it is only the cries that hold the pieces together. Heads and waving handkerchiefs at every window and port-hole. . . .

"Here I am!" cries someone lost in the crush.

A group of marines on the prow of the boat are whistling shrilly, some bareheaded women shout themselves hoarse, others weep, the mandolins attack the *Marseillaise*; and in all this tumult, each passenger tries to pick out the voice meant for himself.

"Au revoir! Au re-vo-o-ir! . . ."

To how many did the words mean "adieu"?

At the extreme end of the wharf to which the crowd had shifted quickly, my eye caught the gleam of the white collars of a group of nuns. Soon I could distinguish nothing of the crowd but these spots of light in the deepening blackness. White robes: those are the Benedictines of Paris. Black robes: those belong to the Order of Saint-Maur. They have come to bid farewell to their sisters who are leaving for Asia. Most of

them are going to Siam or the Philippines to nurse the lepers.

"Will they be gone for a long time?" I inquired of a steward who rushed past me.

"Forever," he replied.

WE have not yet emerged from the bay and the boat is still moving smoothly. Watching the disappearing horizon from the port side, I recognize the Quai des Belges by its numerous lights. Then, as we near the edge of the harbor, an amphitheatre of lights bursts forth about us: all Marseilles awakes with its holiday air. Along the edges of the wharves, the reflected lights glimmer on the surface of the water. With every wave their brilliant points flash into view, then disappear again behind the boat, as if the earth were rocking.

"You'll feel the difference as soon as we clear the harbor," the deck-steward has warned us.

I dare take no chances on this moving platform, for even more than seasickness, I dread ridicule; the shame of exhibiting myself livid and trembling to these smart young women briskly making the round of the decks. How I envy them their poise! From their dress and bearing, I try to determine their characters. Then I watch the men pass by, the Englishmen bound for the bar, the ship's officers in dark jackets and gold-

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braided caps. It seems incredible that I shall have to live for weeks with these strangers. I have already noticed several whose looks do not please me. There are others, on the contrary, to whom I take an immediate fancy, just on their appearance.

I am quite aware that such a classification is absurd, that people to whom I have confided in the enthusiasm of the first encounter often turn out to be stupid and disagreeable, while others whom I have sedulously avoided persist in being amiable to me. Yet in spite of these disappointments, I cling faithfully to this credo of first impressions. I continue foolishly to believe that every person wears his character written on his face and that you need but look into his eyes to read his soul. Thus, perhaps only on account of his hoarse voice and muddy complexion, I have taken an instantaneous dislike to this Monsieur Garrot who passes up and down before my chair, chatting with his friends.

Another person whom I don't like is a girl in a tight-fitting leather coat walking alone, her head bare and her hair so short that I at first took her for a boy. She has a way of eyeing people, with head thrown back and chin thrust out, that annoys me intensely. You can see at first glance that she is unendurably pretentious. As she leaned with her elbow on the rail, watching the shore slip by, a lady called to her:

"Odette!"

She didn't budge. Then a gentleman whom I took to be her father repeated in a louder voice:

"Odette!"

This time she seemed to hear. Swinging sharply, as if she had been disturbed, she answered in a cutting voice:

"Not so loud, if you please."

Without another word, she turned on her heel and marched off in the opposite direction. Funny people. . . .

There are others who look more attractive. A lady with a fur rug on her lap sitting all by herself, a newly married couple, their chairs close together, some haughty-looking naval officers, scrupulously dressed. I am also glad to observe my old American who had been reading in the saloon and who is now conversing with the purser, a pleasant fellow with a Marseilles accent.

Scraps of conversation float up to me from the passageway:

"When we were in Manila . . ."

"I'm going to meet him at Raffles', in Singapore . . ."

"Any news from Canton? . . ."

The very sound of the names intoxicates me. I listen to them greedily, I drink them in. . . . They

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evoke strange islands, Chinese junks, pagoda roofs, negroes in rose and blue loin-cloths sitting under the climbing jasmine. There are words as seductive as lovely faces. These people, however, utter them with no trace of emotion; they have no mind for adventure. To live on the banks of the Blue River or in the rice fields of Annam, to count in piastres, ride in rickshaws, have become for them as uneventful as opening a newspaper or hailing a taxi. They are returning to the Celebes or Hong-kong like a lawyer to his home town, a manufacturer to his mill. Habit . . . But I listen to them eagerly, and with the casual words they let fall I build myself a world and traverse its seven seas.

Gradually, the strolling groups thin out as the cold drives them inside. Soon it is time for me to go back to my cabin and begin unpacking. But I lack the courage; it takes too much effort.

Not far from me a woman sits down on a steamer chair. She looks thin and no longer young. Her husband, a fat little man, bounds along beside her, buried under a mountain of plaids which seem too much for his short arms. He tucks his wife in carefully, slipping a pillow under her head:

“Feeling all right?”

“No,” answers a petulant voice. “You know per-

fectly well that I'm always sick the first day. Let me alone."

The little man makes no reply. He sits down discreetly at the foot of the chair and watches the shore lights disappear. By now a stiff chill breeze has blown up and as we emerge into the open sea the waves grow higher and the boat begins to roll.

"Oh, how it pitches!" groans the sick woman.

Her husband dares not deny it. Quite helpless, he stands up and looks at his wife, wondering how to reason with her.

"Look," he says at last, "I'll show you that it's not pitching as much as you think." And, both his fat arms outflung, he balances himself on one foot in the sprightly pose of the flying Mercury. Wasted effort: she does not even glance in his direction. He sits down again and gathers a corner of the blanket over his knees. With a resigned sigh, he turns his eyes to heaven and begins counting the stars. . . .

Just then a gong rings out over the deserted deck: the signal for dinner. The little man's fat body quivers, wriggles, and his eyes turn toward his wife. She knows what he wants.

"Stay here!" she commands.

He submits. When I arise, none too steady on my legs, his envious eyes follow me. Poor chap! He is gnawing his lips as if to restrain his hunger.

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THE dining room is rather empty for this first meal. No evening gowns or dinner jackets; it is the custom not to dress on the first night out. In little groups the passengers emerge from the elevator that connects the four decks, the most fashionable being the last to arrive—another custom.

Gleaming table linen, silver and crystal. Are we really at sea? You hardly notice that the floor is moving and that the table seems to slide away.

“Pretty rough sea tonight,” the waiter assures us, however.

Rough? Nonsense! Who would notice it in this palatial dining-room? The sea will have to rise a great deal higher before the sound of an unduly powerful wave battering the ship’s side is audible to anyone.

At the small tables of the rich there are *bon voyage* flowers and baskets of rare fruits. But no laughter—still another convention. At the long tables, however, where the civil officials of Indo-China are seated—officials travelling at the government’s expense—there is greater abandon; they chat and laugh uproariously and greet with epicurean delight the interminable procession of carefully chosen dishes: “*Délices de sole . . . Mousse de foie gras au Xérès . . . Suprême de poularde à l’Oriental . . . Faisan au suc d’ananas . . .*” For them this crossing means one month of ease, luxury, and freedom. There are many

foreigners too, who are glad to desert their own country's boats for our *Messageries Maritimes*, knowing that here they will find better food and more gaiety.

I cast my eyes over the passengers, leisurely singling out the ones that seem interesting. In the distance I see Monsieur Garrot and three other gentlemen who are having champagne with their dinner.

"Those are Shanghai people," my neighbor informs me.

Not far from them, seated between her father and mother, I recognize the young girl with the boyish hair-cut. Then my eye is caught by a pretty brunette with a Creole complexion who eats without saying a word, in the company of a husband who looks bored and a guest who laughs too much. The husband is not bad looking, but the friend is horrible—bulging eyes, a ridiculous little pug nose and not a hair on his head. My neighbor cannot look at this trio without laughing.

"What a card!" he exclaims, indicating the husband. "I know him pretty well; he's a big rubber planter. Ever since he got married he's been so jealous of his wife that he takes care to surround her only with such monstrosities as that awful creature. He met the little lady in Saigon where she was playing in a circuit company and, Lord, how he distrusts her . . ."

At these words one of our fellow-diners leans for-

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ward: "Was she with the operetta troupe?" he inquires. "Two years ago, wasn't it? . . . Yes, they certainly did make rich marriages in those days."

It turns out that the speaker is the director of a comic-opera company bound for Indo-China. Happy to have found this opportunity of introducing himself, he begins to tell us about the members of his company who are also on our boat, travelling second-class. His jolly air makes me take to him at once. He cannot say two words without interjecting: "That's fine . . . I'm so glad . . ." He has a pair of eyes like a hunted bird's which he rolls continually. He smiles at every word he utters, is profuse in offering his services, promises complimentary seats to everyone and lends in advance an automobile which he is not yet certain of securing. Thanks to him and to the loquacious colonial, the ice is broken and conversation grows general.

The boat begins to roll more violently, but as nobody around me seems to take notice of it, I dare not say anything. At a nearby table some ladies rise and leave hurriedly. With a disdainful smile the women who are holding their ground watch them go out. No, never would I be able to brave those smiles . . . Now the boat pitches forward in the midst of its rolling and I seem to sink with it. My legs grow weak, the perspiration starts on my forehead.

If I could only get out in the fresh air! The moment the fruit is served, I arise without waiting for anyone and make for the deck. What a miraculous relief—that first gust of wind! I feel stronger immediately and the perspiration dries on my brow. I, seasick? Nonsense!

The bar at the end of the promenade deck where they are taking coffee is already full, and there is an animated dispute in progress for the possession of the few remaining tables on the terrace. Deep in a wicker armchair, I leisurely sip my cup of content. Everything amuses me: an Annamite (or Siamese?—I cannot as yet distinguish between them) who is smoking a cigar too big for his face; the pretty Creole nervously pacing the deck, dogged by her husband and the booby; some lively Englishmen imbibing brandy and exchanging Indian hunting anecdotes; the Shanghaians maligning the Japanese. I look and listen . . . A peculiar atmosphere hovers over this place; even the most commonplace passenger has character: he incarnates for me the Philippines, Colombo, Singapore, China . . . Mere association with these people transports me to foreign lands.

But I have been up since early dawn and fatigue overcomes me. Without a word to anyone, I slip back to my cabin. This miniature room where everything has its appointed place delights me: the compact

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berth, the closet, the folding table and the wash-stand. No decorations, only the life-saving belt and a placard giving the number of the life-boat to which I must report in case of accident. Enough!

I shall sleep well here, with my port-hole wide open and the sea-wind in my nostrils. At this moment it is blowing so hard that the noise of the waves is drowned out. Lying snugly in my berth, one with this enormous mass, I feel the ship trembling under me, rocking from bow to stern, rolling from one side to the other, and then suddenly sinking all at once, as if the sea were vanishing beneath it.

My first night on the open sea—how many years I have dreamed of it! I purposely keep myself awake to savour my delight a little longer. Violent gusts of wind rush into my cabin. The wooden partitions crack and the ship's framework groans. For a moment the wind is silent and from the saloon comes the sound of a piano playing the blues.

ODETTE NICOLAI

WHAT bliss to wake up, thrust your disheveled head through the port-hole and see nothing but the unending sea! Free, I am free . . . The stinging ocean air and brilliant sunshine intoxicate me with a novel exhilaration. Immediately comes the urge to go up on deck, where I find some early risers already promenading. It is difficult to stand still; there are so many discoveries to be made about everything and everyone. Happiness seems to surround you on all sides and you hardly know where to turn first. You walk a bit, come back, stretch out, go off again, sit down for a moment, consult the map, look over the side of the ship, cross the saloon, walk up to the bar, climb up on the spardeck, come down again and, when your impatient body relaxes a bit, you lean against the prow of the boat in the morning sunshine, with eyes half-closed, peaceful, your face bathed in light.

Repose, day-dreams, perfect happiness, are never

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really attained except on the open sea. Everyone has left his troubles behind at the port, has banished all apprehensions, restraints, disappointments. Besides, it does no good to worry, there is nothing you can do here to remedy matters. Let come what may . . . your care-free heart now beats only for yourself.

With chin poised on my arms, watching the white foam browse over the waves like miniature sheep, I repeat to myself: "Yes, this is good . . ." Only in my childhood, on the first morning of vacation, have I known such intoxicating joy. The voyage will never last long enough to satisfy my thirst for liberty and adventure. I have departed at last!

"Where are you going?" they sometimes ask as you embark.

Where? What difference? As if the destination matters! For me, the voyage does not lie in the arrival, but the departure. It is the anticipation of the journey ahead which is opening up, the unforeseen that is waiting at the next port, the unquenchable hunger for new things, the desire to test your dreams against the actuality: it is the lure of tomorrow, the eternal tomorrow.

DESPITE the brilliant sun it is still cold and the steamer-chairs are occupied only by a few hardy ones,

lying completely muffled in their square blankets. As we enter the mouth of the Bonifacio, these passengers arise curiously, and others who have never yet appeared on deck now come out of their cabins, apprized by the chambermaid. But the mountainous coast of Corsica cannot hold them at the railings for very long: the sea is too rough. As soon as the straits are cleared, the deck is deserted once more.

Nevertheless it is very pleasant here in this bracing wind, and when you walk quickly you hardly feel the motion of the boat. Some naval officers on their way to rejoin the Chinese squadron promenade in a group, glancing discreetly as they pass in front of the steamer-chairs. One passenger in particular intrigues them: the elegant lady reading by herself in a studied pose. She may be more than forty but her lovely eyes deny it; and besides, what attraction can mere youth hold for these seasoned sailors who are returning to a country where their lady-loves are seldom over thirteen? There are two Englishmen who march more briskly than anyone else. One is a tall beardless youth with innocent eyes and straw-colored hair; the other, thickset, with a brush-like moustache, is dressed in golf knickers too large for him which fall below his calves.

Elbow to elbow, at a uniform pace, they march without stopping or saying a word to each other, and

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laugh naïvely whenever they overtake other passengers. They march thus this morning, all aglow from their cold shower; they will march after lunch, flushed from their glass of cognac; they will march this evening, they will march tomorrow . . . The promenade deck is one hundred and fifty metres long; fifteen rounds in the morning, fifteen in the afternoon, as many before dinner, and a few more before retiring—in the course of the day they will have done their five thousand metres. This is what they call “sport”. When they finally stop, it is to talk about Paris which they have just visited; they know that the capital is thirty-three kilometres round and that the Arc de Triomphe is forty-nine and one-half metres high. Their posers abash even the Parisians: how many bridges are there on the Seine? how many avenues open into the Place de l’Etoile? The natives hesitate and begin counting on their fingers at which their questioners burst into laughter: “Twelve, of course!” . . . And off they walk merrily, their thick-soled oxfords clacking on the wooden deck.

The children amuse themselves by shouting and hurling themselves against our legs. The very young ones have been prudently enclosed between four barriers, constructed like a miniature sheep-fold. Some of them have very strict nurses who speak only Eng-

lish, and others have Chinese *amahs* or Annamites who squat on their heels and chew betel.

"Bring the baby here!" you will hear a mother call occasionally.

And the nurse brings it to her as one would present a fowl at table before carving. The mother plays a moment with the happy child stumbling on its weak legs. Soon, because he has fallen, or perhaps for no reason at all, the baby begins to cry; then quickly, the nurse must carry him away like some shameful object, and he is put back into his sheep-fold stamping with rage.

Most of the passengers do not know each other yet, but their glances already say good-morning. Everyone smiles, waiting for an opportunity. For the time being, they remain indoors at the bar or in the saloon, the colonials, the Chinese French, and the English forming three distinct divisions. The old American, a journalist, I have been told, has already installed his typewriter in the reading-room and is tapping away at it untiringly. Near the other side of the bay-window a young woman with a forbidding face has taken possession of the piano and is playing sonatas and fugues so determinedly that the young folks are reduced to dancing the fox-trot to Bach or Beethoven, with a typewriter obligato.

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All this amuses me greatly. A vacation more exciting than any I have known is beginning for me. This bar with its shining fixtures and lattice-work terrace banked with flower boxes of laurel will be our casino. And, for the promised excursion, the whole earth . . .

I HAD just been accosted by a tall, grim-looking individual whom I at first mistook for a naval officer on account of his gold-braided uniform. When he asked me how I was finding the trip I began to pour forth my lyric impressions. He glanced at me with a surprised expression, his forehead puckering over gray-black eyebrows. Then with a little grimace, he said:

“You’ll come to your senses soon enough. All the people here are odious. Particularly the women; all sick to their stomachs.”

This preposterous point of view left me speechless. To enlighten me, the stranger added: “I’m the ship’s doctor.”

After such an odd introduction, he could not help interesting me; time only corroborated this impression. In the course of the journey I was to meet many odd people, but no one who could hold a candle to this naval physician who detested only two things in the world: patients and the sea. No, never have I encoun-

tered anybody more pessimistic, more gloomy, more disillusioned than this man. He had a manner of accosting you with a "Would you believe . . ." that immediately made you envisage the most dire catastrophes. He seemed to bloom in unhappiness, and I am convinced that in the face of a shipwreck he would be very gay. He spoke to you about the most inconsequential things with such a gloomy air, stroking his short moustache the wrong way; his views were so cheerless, his tone so bitter, that you wondered at first whether he were not mocking you by his exaggerations. But no, he was a sincere man. He was simply disgusted. With what? With everything . . . With the patients whom he fled from one end of the steamer to another; with the sea which he abominated to the extent of curtaining his port-holes so that he should no longer see it. With nature too. Should you admire a forest along the coast he would begin with consternation:

"Yes, indeed, a pretty sight! . . . Do you know how long a tree lives? One year. Then it dies. Another pushes up around its carcass and dies in its turn twelve months later. You have only to cut it down and count the rings: the whole family of corpses lies there. What is it you admire? An old forest of skeletons, one vast cemetery . . ."

And away he would go, hunching his shoulders.

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He had a veritable genius for discovering the bad in the good, the worm in the fruit, the misery behind happiness. Everything for him was an occasion for bitter reflections and discouraging comments. If he heard a child crying on deck he would mumble between his yellow teeth: "The symbol of life . . . Man comes into the world more helpless than a chicken; he knows neither how to walk, talk, nor eat. There is only one thing that he knows without being taught: how to cry."

Whereupon he would turn to the dumfounded mother and shout with the voice of a Provençal marionette: "Yes, Madame, tears! That's nature's only gift."

Such as he was, I took a fancy to him immediately. He began to tell me about his patients in short choppy phrases, chewing one half of his words and growling the other half: "They all hang on the bell . . . It's grotesque! . . . What can I do for them?"

Then, having sent away the steward who had come to summon him for cabin 15, he explained himself more clearly: "I know them all . . . No sicker than you or I . . . Fresh as a fish in the net. The only thing the matter with them is that they're afraid, they're on their guard, they follow every movement of the boat, they watch the sea appear and disappear at the port-hole. At the end of an hour, all they need is

the basin . . . And must I be inconvenienced for that? Must I be there just to hold their heads?"

"But," I interrupted, remembering my own trouble of last night, "there are some people who really get seasick. Don't you think a remedy should be found?"

He looked at me askance, as if I had uttered an unpardonable piece of foolishness.

"But, Monsieur, there is no such thing as seasickness," he rebuked me gently. "It's only in very rough weather that people complain all together, but that's not the same thing, there's no real malady involved. And in normal weather you won't find more than one sick passenger in a thousand. Is that important? Is it worth while to harass the biologists, mobilize the professors, and annoy the laboratories on his account? Certainly not, they have other things to do. . . ."

Then he launched an attack on the sea: "Look at that imbecile! It can't even keep itself quiet . . . And they're afraid of that!"

To tell the truth, he didn't like it any better in calm weather. He would look at the smooth waves, sniff, and then growl: "Just oil . . . The Lake of Enghien . . . What's the point of travelling on a thing like that? My word, I would spit in it, if it weren't that I'd be adding more water . . ."

He had been travelling a long time on the Chinese line and was acquainted with most of the passengers,

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though he had always avoided any intimacy; and as we walked up and down the deck he presented them to me in terse phrases, rarely complimentary. The first one we saw was the Fat Little Man, unaccompanied by his wife:

"He's much better without that woman. Do you know her? A gendarme, I tell you. . . . If she insisted they would have to let her take the captain's command."

"And he?"

"Got a good position in the customs in Indo-China. More stomach than brains."

As we passed under the bridge we crossed the couple that I had noticed the night before, the parents of the girl with the short hair.

"The amorous postmaster," said the doctor. "A rogue, that fellow . . . He was a petty post-office official at Saigon when he met his wife at the wicket: it was to be his last collection. That registration brought him good luck, for the lady was the widow of Nicolai, the rice planter, who had just died. She was ten years his senior and had a grown daughter, but she married him all the same. She thought him so handsome. Soon came the war, a heavy trade in rice, a rise in the piastre, and now he's one of the richest men in Cochin-China."

"Still a gay dog?"

"In a way . . . but he shows it. He's as vain as a negro. And if there's one person who makes his life hard, that's Odette, his step-daughter. She can't abide him."

Then he gave me some information about Monsieur Garrot, who was very rich at present, but might be penniless in six months; for fifteen years he had been vacillating thus between fortune and utter ruin, depending on the state of the stock-market.

"Wait till you see Shanghai. More banks than houses. The dollar is the crucifix, and in the stores nobody pays—they sign checks the way people sign postcards in France."

While we were talking I noticed that many of the passengers greeted my companion very amiably, but he seemed unaware of it, dropping his head and averting his glance. I was to learn later that he was the most devoted of doctors; but that he disliked anyone to mention it or, more particularly, thank him. In truth, he seemed ashamed of his zeal.

"What a profession!" he grumbled. "Treating sailor's panaris, hæmaturia in the Red Sea, clap wounds received in the service of Venus. Watching my patients vomit, prescribing sulfate of soda. . . . Ridiculous. . . . Pitiabie."

He turned to reward a smile from the Solitary Lady with a grimace that did its best to be gracious.

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"You have your compensations," I said to him. "You come in contact with so many lovely ladies."

A look of disgust spread over his face: "What a dreadful idea! I can never understand those doctors who flirt with their patients. Tell me, how can a man have the slightest desire for a woman who, from the very first encounter, reveals to him without shame all the most miserable and intimate details of her life, who does nothing but impart repugnant confidences to him, and exhibits without the least embarrassment, before one has even thought of asking her to, the most disgraceful part of her body? . . . It's a very simple matter for me: there are neither blondes, nor brunettes, nor red-heads; only cases of enteritis, chlorosis, albuminuria—"

He was in the midst of this harangue when the steward whom he had previously dismissed returned to call him again for the lady in cabin 15. The doctor assumed a tragically resigned air. "All right. I'm coming."

Then he called me to witness: "Do you know what she's done, that fool? She collected advice before she started, and I can't think of anything more harmful. Some imbeciles who have never even set foot on a tug-boat gave her their recipes, the corner druggist threw in his own prescriptions, and she very obediently listened to all of them. 'Bind your stomach!'

some one told her. And she bound it. 'Drink lemon juice,' another advised. She drank it. . . . 'Walk a lot.' . . . 'Put cotton in your ears.' . . . 'Lie down.' . . . 'Eat.' . . . 'Fast.' . . . 'Take adrenaline.' . . . 'Suck tooth-picks to facilitate the flow of saliva.' . . . 'Buy a bottle of seasick remedy.' . . . And she did everything, the poor idiot, literally everything! She went on board so crammed full of pills and capsules, her stomach so ruined with horse medicines and her head spinning with opium, that she would have been seasick even if she had stayed on land. And do you know what surprises me? That it didn't kill her, the fool! And those are the kind of people I have to nurse!"

To encourage him, I ventured: "Of course. Even an elephant couldn't stand such a régime."

The words were evidently ill chosen. He looked up with a distressed air, barely refraining from shrugging his shoulders at me.

"But the elephant isn't nearly as tough as you imagine," he reproved me, like a sorely tried teacher correcting a dunce. "The elephant is a very delicate creature. You must watch his diet carefully and never overwork him, and even this doesn't prevent him from dying for no reason at all. Yes, I see that you too have set out on your trip with fixed ideas!"

And with his hands buried in his pockets, dragging

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his enormous shoes, he walked off towards the elevator.

THE next day the sea had calmed down completely; it was perfect regatta weather. The idle waves lapped gently against our huge boat which cut straight through, gliding smoothly, her head in the sun. The operetta director, with whom I had come up on board, was shaking hands right and left; he already knew everybody. He began to talk to me about his troupe:

"I'm allowing them another day's rest," he said, "but tomorrow, to work! Imagine, we have to rehearse twelve comic-operas and operettas and my leading tenor has never been on the stage in his life. . . ."

I looked at him in some surprise, but he seemed not in the least affected; on the contrary, he was beaming.

"Never in his life!" he repeated triumphantly, as if he were informing me that he had just launched him as a star at the Metropolitan or La Scala. "Yes, an amazing chap!"

He explained to me how he had come to take on such a novice for his leading tenor. The jovial director had suffered a succession of mishaps and disasters which would have crushed anyone else, but which he related with great sprightliness as if he had won a happy victory each time. As his talk grew more ani-

mated, his eyes rolled merrily all around and he had to restrain a clucking little laugh which seemed to say that he found these misfortunes really too funny.

“Well, I finally got my troupe together, we were all ready, our passports signed and our cabins reserved when, presto! my tenor, a Russian, catches a bad case of grippe and passes out in two days. Just on the night before sailing! A fine pickle.”

But this latest catastrophe did not dishearten him; he had seen so many during his numberless tours to the four corners of the globe. In one day everything was fixed up: luck, for once, had favored him. The prima donna of the company had recently taken as her lover a young man of excellent family who planned to meet her in Indo-China and settle on a plantation there. However, (here the radiant face of the director seemed to say: “You see how beautifully God arranges everything”) the poor fellow had suddenly lost all his fortune and had no money with which to follow his mistress. It was this last catastrophe that set everything right.

“Who could have imagined that this young man had studied at the Paris Conservatory before the war, just for his amusement, of course, never dreaming of making it a career, and that he had a splendid voice? Wait till you hear him in *Werther*! My prima donna brought him to me after I had suffered through a

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dozen awful try-outs. He sang, I was enchanted, he signed up, and here we are. . . ."

Outside of his troupe, the season's program, costumes and scenery, nothing interested the director. He never said "I know Mexico . . ." but: "We once played *Le Petit Duc* there." The names of cities evoked no landscapes for him, only stage settings. "Imagine, in Bogato the natives rigged up a virgin forest and a gilded saloon for us in which to play *Mireille*. . . ." What attracted him to Indo-China at present was the government subsidy. "All expenses paid, I'll have over ten thousand piastres left, more than one hundred thousand francs. Isn't that splendid?"

But it was impossible to get anything else out of him. He cared so little about natural beauty that, as we were entering the Straits of Messina, he left me to join his manager at the second-class bar. "I've already seen that," he told me as an excuse. "I once went to Egypt with a company playing *Cyrano*. But you ought to see it, it's very pretty, a real stage-setting."

As he went away, the other passengers, less blasé, came running out of cabins and saloons. I noticed the Fat Little Man adjusting a huge photographic apparatus.

"I spoiled the Stromboli one this morning," he said

as he prepared his plates. "I must make up for it."

Everyone took out his binoculars for the sun was dazzling to the eyes. The coast of Italy which had been only a misty line a few moments ago, now spread out before us and began to take shape. Soon we could distinguish Calabria, barren and gloomy, with a sprinkling of tiny white houses along the water's edge. A toy railroad train followed the line of the shore; it was swallowed up in a tunnel, then reappeared farther away. The hill-side seemed covered with something that looked like moss but was really grape-vines. And towering above the summit stood a line of giant old trees.

"How marvellous!" the Solitary Lady murmured softly to herself, just loud enough to be heard.

A young naval officer stood bare-headed at the railing, his blond hair ruffled in the breeze. He was obligingly giving out information to the passengers, citing the names of capes and villages. Upon our entrance into the straits, he appeared to be doing the honors as if he were crossing his own threshold.

"Scylla!" he announced pointing toward an imperceptible point on the Calabrian coast.

Everyone peered forward. Surely not that insignificant spot! They searched the rocks, and could see nothing but monotonous-looking reefs, neither very large nor very sharp.

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"And Charybdis?" a lady asked.

Our guide led us over to the starboard, nearer the Sicilian coast and stretched out his arm:

"There . . ."

We looked in vain . . . no trace of Charybdis. Even after borrowing the most powerful field-glasses, we could see nothing, not so much as a wave, not a ripple on the sea. There was no longer even a ring on the surface of the water to indicate the site of the notorious whirlpool. The young officer was enjoying our astonishment. He relished it as though it were a personal triumph and smiled as he leaned against the railing, waiting to continue his discourse.

"Ulysses didn't run much of a risk," he remarked. "He must have been a pretty poor navigator!"

This fellow had studied the ship's route as one crams for an examination. He knew his Mediterranean by heart: Venus Anadyomene, Cytherea, Pasiphaë, the flocks of Polyphemus, the Liparian Isles where Æolus gave Ulysses the bag of winds. And what won't one say at twenty-five for the sake of a smile? . . . Complaisantly, not without a trace of vainglory, he explained to us:

"The current of the vortex runs from northwest to southwest. That's why the Greeks used to say that in trying to avoid Charybdis you encounter—"

A burst of forced impertinent laughter cut short his words. "Scylla!" finished the laughing voice.

I turned round: it was the young girl with the short hair. Everyone eyed her severely, but she seemed not in the least disconcerted. She gazed with a mocking expression at the interrupted narrator.

"Tell me, lieutenant," she went on, "isn't that the story of the Odyssey that you're about to tell us? Really, that's too funny!"

And turning abruptly on her heels, she slipped between the passengers and went off without another word. The nonplussed young officer was stumped for a reply.

"That's the Nicolai girl again," murmured a colonial lady at my side. "She thinks she can do anything she pleases. What a nuisance!"

"Please go on," begged another young lady. "Your story interests *us*. . . ."

The lieutenant collected himself, but he found it hard to pocket the affront. "No," he said in a rather husky voice, "I haven't anything more to say on that subject. Look how near we're getting to the coast. We are now entering the straits."

A gray vapor, the smoke from Mount Etna, half hides the land, but gradually Messina emerges. It is an agglomeration of massive walls, long white bar-

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racks, and at their base several low buildings, probably custom houses, situated at the end of the jetty and looking as forlorn as a hospital.

In the distance a long viaduct, like a centipede. Here and there some sumptuous villas under the cypress trees. The countryside rolls out marvellously fertile, adorned with vines, gilded with sunshine, and the smoke from the volcano forms a strange threatening contrast to this smiling land.

Messina disappears and now we pass close to the other shore, the rough coast of Calabria. A spot of green, a semaphore, and it is over, we have cleared the straits. Soon nothing can be distinguished on the bare mountains but a few climbing trees, like black goats searching in vain for pasture. And on the open sea now grown rough, the boat resumes its course, rearing and plunging like a spirited animal.

THE blond lieutenant had been passing up and down several times in front of Mlle. Nicolai who pretended not to see him. He glanced at her out of the tail of his eye, without turning his head. "Oh! if I were only a passenger instead of being attached to the ship!" he raged, as he strode furiously across the deck. How he would love to take his revenge, to humiliate her, perhaps to win her over by making himself amiable at the beginning.

"Yes, I'll make her believe that I love her!" he schemed, watching her.

With the vanity of a good-looking young man he never doubted for a moment that his plan would work out. The young girl sat on a bench with her legs crossed too high, and her hands folded on the knee left completely exposed by her short skirt. The men stared at her, but she ignored them, preserving her distant look and immobile features: complete indifference. But you felt that this was an acquired attitude, a style that she imposed on herself because of a desire to shock people. Suddenly she darted up and resumed her promenade, affecting the swinging stride and brusque mannerisms of a boy.

"Show-off!" grumbled the lieutenant between his teeth. "If she were only pretty!"

Was she? No . . . But her face was as striking as her manners. She took no pains to beautify herself—no powder, no rouge, her hair plastered down severely. It was simplicity pushed to the extreme, though very carefully calculated: "I can't be the most beautiful, but they'll notice me all the same." With her too sharply defined features, her stubborn chin, her long green eyes dark-circled down to the cheeks, and her pale face rendered even whiter by the shining frame of her jet hair, she reminded you of the child Colomba. She was no favorite with the

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old habitués of the line, particularly the colonials.

Evenings, when she danced in the saloon, their eyes never left her. The young girls would mechanically criticize her in a low voice as they fox-trotted, and in the corners their mothers would comment more vigorously: "You know, if she weren't so rich, she wouldn't be so insolent . . ." It was her wealth that really annoyed them, but this of course they would not admit. Sometimes, during meals, a terrific discussion would break out at the Nicolai table. Immediately all the neighbors lowered their voices and strained their ears. "Do you hear how she speaks to her parents? It's shameful! . . ." This would take place at almost all the meals. The little colonial hated her step-father, she was ashamed of him. I understood why later: he was really too ridiculous with his fop-pish conceited expression and his frizzed hair. As soon as they sat down to table she watched him fiercely, waiting for him to use the wrong fork or start to dip his bread in the sauce. Immediately she brought him to order, but indirectly, without saying a word; she would cough, regard him fixedly, and pretend that all the neighbors were watching his loutish manners, or call the attention of her mother: "Mother, I beg you, tell him . . ." *Him* was her second father. She never referred to him by any other title.

In the saloon or bar when the former post-master tried to make an impression with his conversation she would smile in an irritating way; and if, in an attempt to be fashionable, he risked a few words of English, she would catch him up in a loud voice in front of everybody.

"If you please," he would say, pronouncing it *plèse*.

"Please!" she corrected dryly.

And the assembled company would glance at one another, embarrassed. Occasionally, someone tried to make her listen to reason. "You're not acting right, you're hurting your mother."

"What difference does that make to me?" she retorted defiantly.

Did they say that she didn't love her mother? So much the better! What she was intent on hiding was her childish hurt, her jealousy. How she had suffered when she came back to Indo-China after the War to find her mother so changed. Still tender, of course, but preoccupied now with someone else. She had suffered almost to the point of death, but nobody had ever seen her cry. She never displayed her secret feelings; she would be ashamed of them. And rather than be pitied, she preferred to be detested.

"I don't love anybody," she declared aggressively. "Not even myself."

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She thought she was telling the truth. The restrained ardour of her passionate nature had been wounded and she believed that she was marked forever. "I will never love," she declared disdainfully. Never, forever, these are words that rise glibly to the lips at that age when every tomorrow signifies the whole future. . . .

She did not suffer on account of the surrounding hostility; on the contrary, it stimulated her. That she be noticed, whether for good or ill, was all she asked. Only one thing would have killed her: to pass unobserved, to appear insignificant. To make people talk about her she would have dared anything.

As she loved no one, the sight of others in love appeared ridiculous to her. The flirtations of her girl friends from Saigon made her snicker, and as soon as she discovered two passengers who danced together more often than usual or who drew their chairs too closely together, she began to comment about it out loud, happy to be able to scandalize the company.

At the end of two days the blond lieutenant was convinced that he knew her perfectly. "She's a little hussy," he decided once and for all. He had invited her to dance on the very night of the insult and introduced her to his best friend, a lieutenant-mechanician about his own age, but not quite so enterprising and a bit awkward; they both became the regular partners

of the young girl. She dragged them everywhere authoritatively. At the very beginning, in the tone of one who has nothing more to learn, she had warned them:

“You know, love bores me. So don’t waste your time paying court to me.”

However, neither of them seemed inclined to do so; the young mechanic because he admired his comrade too much to dream of shining beside him, and the lieutenant because he had figured out that it would be wiser to wait. Besides, if while dancing he risked the slightest compliment, she looked at him with such a frigid air that he immediately lost heart. Or else she burst into hilarious laughter which made everyone in the saloon turn around.

These little escapades were the evening’s favorite pastime. We saw intrigues beginning, liaisons budding . . . The midshipman of the squadron never quitted the side of the beautiful Egyptian woman. A banker from Pekin was teaching the two-step to a red-haired little English girl. But the person whose affairs amused us most was the Creole. It pained her husband to see her dancing with anyone except the creature with the batrachian eyes, but since she could hardly refuse the invitations of all the passengers who asked her, he accorded her permission to accept one, or at the most two, every evening. The jealous

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planter tried to choose these partners from among the worst looking, and nothing was funnier than to see her sail off in the arms of the victor. If he pleased her, she let herself go immediately and took him into her confidence. It was the same confession every time, couched almost in the same words:

"I'm not as happy as people imagine," she would sigh. "It's true that my husband satisfies all my whims but I haven't the right to laugh, the right to speak, think, or even live. He surrounds me with luxury, but no happiness. I'm nothing but a bird in a cage. . ."

It must have given her an exalted feeling to bare her misunderstood soul, for if she had not terminated her confidences at the end of a dance, she would be the first to cry "Encore!" so as to have time to finish. Naturally her partners had been indiscreet and repeated what she told them, so that now we always referred to the sensitive Creole as the "Bird-in-the-cage."

It was the militant wife of the Fat Little Man who had invented the name. The purser had been the only one with courage enough to ask her to dance; she had all the rest of the time in which to criticize the passengers. Nobody was spared: the Solitary Lady, who refused all dance invitations with a smile and retired early—"Those are the worst kind"; the

ODETTE NICOLAI

newly-wed couple who she thought looked like nin-nies; the Spaniard from the Philippines who, it appeared, was misbehaving. But she bore the greatest grudge against the young Nicolai. As the latter went out of the saloon, eyeing her insolently, she remarked in a peevish voice:

“There’s a typical modern girl for you, no breasts and no heart. . . .”

Odette’s parents overheard. They pretended not to have understood.

MY FRIENDS FROM CHINA

IT does not take very much to strike up acquaintance on board. A mere nothing will suffice: a borrowed field-glass, an introduction in the saloon by the purser who is looking for dancing partners, or simply the fact that you sit at the same table. After three days at sea everybody knows everybody else, if only by sight. But you do not yet know the names of all these people and so you are reduced to calling them by nicknames, like savages. There is the Solitary Lady, who speaks to nobody and passes her days reading in a corner of the saloon; there is the Director, the Bird-in-the-cage, the old American, the Governor's wife, the blond lieutenant, the ugly lady whom the Nicolai's Annamite boy more politely calls Madame Customs, because of her husband's profession. All that you know of anyone is contained in his epithet. To find out more, you must bide your time or else use your imagination. It is this aspect of strangers that intrigues me most. I see only the

mask of beings, behind that I can invent whatever I wish.

Some interest me more than others, for example, this broker from Shanghai, to whom I have not yet spoken. I keep meeting him continually accompanied by three friends: a lanky traveller with a drooping moustache which lends him a false Chinese air, the banker from Peking whose suits, ties, and shoes dazzle the whole boat, and a sort of pachyderm with pock-marked cheeks who, it appears, is Garrot's business associate. This morning they halt as usual before the marine map where a little flag is moved every noon to indicate the present position of the steamer. The Shanghaiian remarks to his associate in his hoarse voice:

"We'll make Port Saïd before lunch."

"No, after," answers the other immediately, in English.

"A pound?"

"Taken!"

And the bet covered, they walk off elbow to elbow, with the same dragging step. I know nothing about these two, but I observe them closely, and after due reflection, come to the conclusion that the associate hates Garrot. Perhaps it is only his physiognomy which makes me think that about him; I cannot believe one can be honest with a face like his. He has

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large, sleepy furtive eyes, enormous ears with tufts of fuzz sprouting from them and a skin so tough and blackened that it might well be used for shoe-leather. They have a fourth friend who never leaves them, whom we call the Lawyer, but this individual does not interest me in the least and I soon eliminate him, in fact he becomes almost invisible to me. In the same way many others cease to be my fellow-passengers. I have measured them quickly and found nothing to pique my curiosity; so I forget them. In vain do they continue to act, talk, gesticulate. They are done for. They have stopped living and, up to the port of arrival, they will have no more significance for me than a deck-chair. What, for example, could I get out of that loquacious official who whispered some tittle-tattle to me about all the passengers at the very first dinner? He told me everything then, he can be of no further service to me: into the sea with him! . . . And what about this engineer from Sumatra whom I thought so profound at first because he kept silent and who, I found out, thinks that colonization can be accomplished with a cudgel? Useless: into the sea! And the lady with the forbidding face who never leaves the piano. Into the sea! In this fashion, I sacrifice a certain number every day, though the passengers making the round of the deck never

suspect, I am sure, the homicidal intent of the glance that follows them.

Leaning against the rail I watch the passengers go by in groups of four and five, the women still wrapped in their furs and the men in their overcoats. Always the same persons interest me, particularly that irritating young girl with the short hair. How can one help noticing her; she takes such pains to be contrary. One moment you see her perched on the railing, smoking a cigarette, a second later she enters the saloon and fixes a pair of huge shell-rimmed glasses on her nose to read a magazine. I would be willing to swear, however, that she detests tobacco and that she is not in the least myopic. One evening she will laugh louder than anyone else and never stop dancing; the next day she will hardly say good-morning to her two officers, walk by herself, and not utter a word during the entire meal—not even to rebuke her step-father. Today, for instance, is one of her bad days, I notice. She is leaning on her elbows not far from me, on the portside. Her cape has been thrown back, leaving her neck and arms bare, and it makes you shiver to see her dressed so scantily with this nasty east wind sweeping the deck. Her mother, who has been looking for her, surprises the girl in this attitude.

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"Odette, you are crazy. You'll get sick. . . ."

This time the young girl does not get angry. She turns her head revealing her large dilated eyes: "That would make me so happy!" she answers dully. Then she begins to cough and her mother drags her away, scolding her in a low voice.

Watching her depart, I think how transformed she has become in four days.

I no longer see her with the same eyes. The first day out she seemed nothing but an annoying big child; now she has grown into an enigmatic young woman whom I endow with struggles and torments.

I treat all the other passengers in the same way. Like a sculptor who models his clay, delicately modifying the face he is working, I retouch these strangers according to my fancy, softening and moulding a bit here and there, sometimes lending one the particularities of another, and, if it happens that a cast is spoiled, I abandon the shapeless mass, hoping that its clay will serve me some other day.

At first I merely look at them. Later I inadvertently begin to meditate on each one. I use my imagination, draw fanciful conclusions, and soon it is no longer the model that exists for me, it is the phantom that I have myself created. Fantastically I juxtapose people who are still mutually unacquainted, I conjecture

on what might happen from their meeting, I try one against the other haphazardly, as a physicist touches a metal to his magnet to test its power of attraction, or as a decorator matches two pieces of cloth to determine the effect.

These passengers who file by me in the full glare of the sun are the unconscious material for my conjectures. What, for example, is going to become of that beardless English lad? He is planning to hunt in India, I have been told. Yes, but here on the boat, what is going to happen to him, what will he do? I unite him to that Egyptian lady with the long goat's eyes who stares boldly at the men as she fingers her string of pearls. She leaves at Port Saïd, but what does that matter? I can easily detain her. I need only her shadow, not herself. Now the young Englishman with his virginal blushes and candid eyes begins to bore me. Suppose I transform him into a ship's officer? Then I envisage the blond lieutenant and the features of both mingle and form one.

And the other Englishman with the golf knickers? I don't like him as he is. At my whim he is instantly transformed, as in those films where the people seem suddenly to melt and reappear under a different aspect. He preserves the same thick-set body, but his cheerful face grows severe, his red moustache turns

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black. Suppose I make these two friends rivals? Throw the Solitary Lady between them, for example. . .

The Shanghai broker intrudes in all these adventures; I observe the results as I watch him first with one, then another, as if I were watching the colors change in a mysterious test-tube. Odette Nicolai also figures prominently in my reveries, but I can never successfully amalgamate the destinies of these last two. Is there anything in common between this rebellious girl and this suspicious-looking financier? I can discover nothing.

My vagabond fancy flits from one end of the boat to the other. Where shall I find the passenger with the scar on his chin whom I have not seen again since that day on the Quai des Belges? And what about all those artistes whom we sometimes hear singing on the second-class poop? I think of their leading lady, Florence Bernard, who is going to play Manon, and of whom the director is so very proud. All I know is that she is blond, but I have already formed a mental portrait of her.

Other passengers, dim shapes, begin to penetrate my dream. They are strangers whom the purser will seek in vain on the passenger lists and whom no one will ever await at the landing. They come from the depths of my consciousness, from meetings only half

MY FRIENDS FROM CHINA

remembered, imaginative inventions of long ago, memories that spring to mind when you have long since forgotten all about them. They crowd into the bulwark and mingle with the passengers. What a strange crew! . . . Soon I can hardly distinguish the people from the shadows. These imaginings enlarge, take on colors, and burst—like soap bubbles.

Unwearied, I begin to blow others and watch them float away. . .

“Well! Getting bored already?”

I jumped at the words. It was the ship’s doctor who had just accosted me. Still stunned, I gazed at him, then replied mechanically: “No, I was working.”

He stared back at me, knitting his brows. It was clear that I had not convinced him.

THIS doctor is certainly a curious personality. If a steamship company should ever commit the indiscretion of installing him in the travel bureau, its receipts would immediately drop fifty per cent. In his opinion, there is nothing in the world worth seeing.

“Yokohama? Yes, I know it. They have good taxis but the hotel cuisine isn’t worth a sou.”

Of Singapore he remembers nothing but the smell of mud, of Colombo only the noisy crows that litter up the streets, and when a lady enamoured of exoti-

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cism raves to him about mysterious old China, he replies with his customary grimace: "I know it . . . One of my friends keeps a garage in Fou-Tcheow."

The idea that I am travelling without being obliged to, without destination, without cause, seems to him the height of folly, and if I were to listen to him, I would make a swift right-about-face for home.

"I don't know where you're going, but I warn you that you won't see anything there. There's nothing more to be seen anywhere. The five parts of the world are exactly alike. The little girls of Rarahu ride on motorcycles and the Pagoda of the Great Buddha is lit by electricity . . . Do you know the Emperor of Siam? No . . . Well, I know him, he travelled with us. Wears a dinner-jacket and plays bridge."

Were you to ask him whether he has ever, in all his travels, seen anything interesting, he will appear to search his memory with difficulty; then, pursing his lips: "Well . . . Yes . . . If I must say it—the Japanese earthquake. But you had to be pretty lucky to be there on time."

Often I accompany him into his office where, stretched on his auscultation divan, I listen to him ranting. A large, empty aquarium on four legs encumbers one corner of the little room and on all the tables, under all the chairs, and in the library, you see other glass globes of differing dimensions. They

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are containers for Chinese fish, those horrible and marvellous fish whose fins are graceful scarves and who trail their slashed robes behind them. Many of the sailors and boys bring them back after each crossing and sell in Marseilles for twenty francs what they have bought for twenty sous in Hong-Kong or Kobe. But they are not able to give these little fish the same care as the doctor who putters around them for hours, maintaining their water at precisely the right temperature and feeding them little worms and gnats caught specially on the Yang-Tse.

"I raise them scientifically, you understand. I put each species in the water it requires; I have studied their habits and know what kind of food they need, while the sailors just throw them in a jar or pail and don't bother about them any more . . . With what result? Those fellows lose half of their fish on the way. I lose three-quarters."

But this doesn't exasperate him; on the contrary he finds it very satisfactory. "It's unbelievable, idiotic: therefore, it's perfectly normal. . . ."

And, this principle established, he undertakes to prove that my trip can have no other result than to disillusion me with regard to several romantic notions that I might still preserve about the exterior world.

"The saddest thing about it," he explains to me,

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“is that when you get back you’ll lie like all the others. You can’t help it. It’s the public—they simply won’t permit a writer to return from the four corners of the earth and put things down just as he saw them. That would be scandalous. ‘Heavens!’ you can hear them exclaim. ‘What was the use of his travelling all that distance? The poor fool’s entirely devoid of poetic imagination!’ Do you know what they expect from a traveller? Lies! A lie is the seal of authenticity. Can you picture yourself telling anyone that a tropical sky is gray? Never! Everybody knows that it’s blue as the Côte d’Azur, blue as blueing, and all that you might write to the contrary wouldn’t change it a particle. Do you think anyone would take you seriously if you maintained that in Japan more people die of streetcar accidents than by hari-kari? Of course not . . . The duty of a traveller is not to destroy legends but to create them. All your Hindus must be majestic, your Chinese inscrutable, your negroes lascivious, your Japanese courteous. They aren’t? So much the worse! Facts are the currency only of those who aren’t clever enough to use lies.”

He goes on in this bewildering strain, passing from an attack on Quaker domination in the Philippines to a criticism of the heating system of mazout*burning

* mazout—a combustible by-product obtained from the distillation of crude oil.—Tr.

ships, interrupting himself from time to time to receive a patient in the next room.

These rapid-fire consultations are miniature farces:

"On land, Madame, you go in for sports, I suppose? Horseback riding? Fine . . . Do you carry the horse on your back? No? . . . Then don't call it exercise. Your horse gets the benefit, not you."

And he advises the nonplussed Englishwoman to sleep without a pillow and to substitute lemons for her morning porridge. He is not joking about this; even in medicine he stands by his principles, and they are better than most. He tells me:

"In itself sickness is always interesting, it's only the patient who isn't. Do you know what has impeded the progress of medical science for centuries? The patients! They're responsible—with their continual groaning and lamentations, their symptoms which they can never describe decently, and their fear of dying. Why does the physician accomplish so much more in the hospitals than in private homes? Because he doesn't allow the patient to babble unnecessarily and because he isn't obliged to dole out imbecile prescriptions in order to justify his visiting fee."

For example, Odette's mother comes every day to tell him how worried she is over the health of her daughter who refuses to submit to an examination. What can he advise?

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"She tells me again and again that the darling eats like a sparrow. What idiocy! . . . like a sparrow! Doesn't she know that sparrows are the most gluttonous creatures alive, that the amount they eat is simply horrifying? All you have to do is to look at one of them, gorging itself until it can't fly. Now if you said a calf. . . There's a poor animal that you can really commend for its lack of appetite. A lean, bony beast that feeds only on milk and never grows fat. But just try to tell a young lady that she eats like a calf! She'll put on an expression of haughty injury and repay you with an insolent reply. I repeat, Monsieur, that the world is entirely inhabited by imbeciles all talking like parrots."

He is less loquacious with the other passengers. In the saloon or on deck he talks to nobody and if you ask him a question he bites the ends of his moustaches and makes a special effort to answer ambiguously. The only person whose company he tolerates is the director, whom he likes. "He's got a good head," he confided to me one day. "I'm sure he'll end in an asylum."

When they meet, they recall former crossings, operatic companies in the days when the ladies of the troupe—who had been engaged to play in Saigon at one hundred and fifty francs a month—were reserved by wireless by important colonial officials and

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rich merchants of the interior. Sometimes these latter even came as far as Singapore to meet the boat and be assured of the best pickings.

These customs do not please the director. "My artistes must be respected!" he declares, holding his hand over his heart. "I set the example myself. And I certainly deserve credit—if you could only see some of them. . ."

We have not seen them yet but we often hear them. I can already distinguish the soft voice of Manon as she rehearses her role or practices her scales. "She's the ship's singing bird," says the director. Even the doctor, who has seen her several times and who took care of her the night of sailing, admits that she is pretty.

"Not very intelligent, of course," he hastens to add. "If trees had no more leaves than she had brains, the gardens would look very bare indeed."

"Oh! don't be too sure of that," protests the director.

And thereupon they begin a debate on the importance, for a woman, of being intelligent.

"They're that way too often," declares the doctor. "It's annoying for the husband."

As the first port draws near, the earth begins to look very small to me. The enormous ball shrinks, soon it

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is no more than a globe-map which you can traverse with your fingers. Is the Orient really so close to France? Then why haven't I come here sooner?

With eyes half shut, I envisage the blue chart of the seas and follow the course of the boat as it ploughs through the longitudes. Perhaps it is because I know the shape of the continents, because as a child I learned to draw their sinuous outlines, that the ocean today does not give me an impression of infinity. We are on the open sea with no land in sight, yet I always seem to see the littoral outline at the edge of the blue circle. I know that land is there, I sense it, and I could trace—as I used to—the smooth outline of Egypt, the indented coast of Greece, the islands of Cyprus and Crete. The countries arrange themselves in my head as on the multi-colored page of my old atlas, and in the middle of the sea, I feel behind the horizon the Libyan desert which perennially arrests my roving fancy.

Another thing which prevents the feeling of isolation is the radio emitting its crackling sparks on the deck every evening. Someone, somewhere, knows exactly where we are, and while we sleep, the ship is still speaking with France.

What does it talk about?

Money, of course. . .

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We have our fill of finance on board. The rich Englishmen are busy with oil, the Dutch follow the course of rubber, and now that the piastre is worth fifteen francs instead of its pre-war value of a half-franc, the French are interested in Indo-China. Even on the ocean they carry their business worries with them; they want to know just where they stand at every moment. The news from their families can wait; the regular post suffices for the transmission of such amenities. But for business! . . . The wireless operator takes off his helmet and flashes his inquiries to the Bourse.

The invisible waves that fade into the sky are numbers, the coastlines are rates and dividends, and if our eyes were subtle enough to read in the night, they would discover that the Milky Way is nothing but a monstrous column of figures.

The associate of the Shanghai broker seems more avid than anyone else for these financial reports. Every night, in the dining room or at the bar, he receives flocks of radio messages which he always reads with mouth agape, as if he were each time learning of his ruin. Sometimes the message is in code; then he leaves the room abruptly to seek his cabin and consult his secret code-book. This procedure annoys everyone, but he does not notice it, or

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rather he does not care. He is playing with fortune, it is his one genuine amusement and he glories in it. He seems a novice at the game.

In contrast to his associate, the broker appears to possess a certain dignity. A parvenu also, but one who does not show off, or at least knows enough to be the first to laugh at himself. In the corner of his eye there is always that mocking little gleam which seems to say: "It's a fine joke, all this, isn't it?" As I come to know him a little better, it is this sly resignation that attracts me to him, contrary to my first impression. "If you have money, so much the better; if you lose it, so much the worse. . ." He has already been ruined three or four times and has always recouped successfully: he knows how it's done.

"You know," he informs me with a laugh, "I'm the kind of a person who needs only luxuries. I can do without the necessities."

He will tell you modestly about his sumptuous residence in Shanghai, his mansion in Passy, his villa at Cannes, and in spite of all the references, he does not impress you as a rich man. He looks as if he were not quite installed in his proper place, as if fate had led him there by mistake and would soon oblige him to abandon everything, both fortune and position, and hire out for an old man's rôle in a provincial stock-company or sell racing tips in

the paddocks of Longchamp. His husky voice gives a vulgar overtone to his speech. There is also something common in his glance and in the mocking twist of his mouth. But you get used to all this quickly and his humor makes you forgive everything else. You no longer notice his lashless eyes, his sunken cheeks, and that crafty head fastened on the chicken-like neck; soon he ceases to be a source of astonishment. You no longer look at him, you listen. He takes nothing seriously, not even himself. "Does my profession surprise you? It shouldn't. All you need is a little agility, the ability to climb more than one step at a time, and to know how to calculate quickly. With that equipment, anyone is capable of dealing in money exchange, of being, as we call it down there, a 'broker', (using the English word). We sell piastres, taels, dollars, and pounds, and Shanghai absorbs them all, you see."

All morning, it seems, these Shanghai brokers gallop through the business section in little carriages, standing on the step so as not to lose a second; and notebook in hand, they run from the banks to the offices, from the English to the Chinese, selling to one what they have just bought from the other, offering francs, asking for yen, adding up their figures on the back of the coachman, calculating as they rush up the stairs . . . In winter they shiver even with the col-

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lars of their fur coats turned up to their eyes, in summer they suffocate and carry a towel in their pockets to mop their streaming foreheads. They burst into an office like a hurricane, hats on their heads, hurling their numbers. The American or Chinese does not even raise his head. Then they make a quick about-face, hurry out, and rush into the next building.

"A hundred and thirty, fifty-eight! Twenty-six, ninety-four! . . ." Here the client may consent to look up at him. "Five thousand dollars!" he says. Not another word, not even a good-bye; the broker has already departed, scribbling his order. He jumps into his carriage and the pony whisks him away. Now he has only to find the dollars he has just sold.

"There's the whole secret," Garrot explains to me: "to know how to cover yourself. For example, you musn't run short in a cent, you may lose a fortune that way. But after all, at an eight per cent. brokerage fee it's worth the trouble."

If he could only prudently content himself with his eight francs for every one hundred francs sold, he would have a more assured fortune. But you end by losing your footing in this rushing current of millions. It is such a temptation to play with the moving dollars, the rising and falling pounds, the stock-market which fluctuates like a febrile pulse.

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“High! . . . Low! . . .”

It is the street urchin's shout of defiance, the challenge to fortune, the lucky roulette number . . . For them the word million does not conjure up the picture of a mountain of gold as it does for a bourgeois; a million is merely a number, several more zeros added to a digit, a word. . . . So they play and speculate and gamble. For their gaming table, they have all the banks of the world. Their moves are mysterious and one can see no cheating. At the end of the play, only a cable: “Dollar up three points.” Which means that so and so loses a million and some banker makes it.

“It's an intoxicating game, you know,” continues the banker in his cracked voice. “After you've been scalped once, you promise yourself to go easy; but try and stop a man from playing cards when that's his profession. . . .”

The more I observe him, the more convinced I become that he is a combination of banker and news-boy. He has ruined his voice crying the fluctuations of the pound, but it might just as well have been ruined in hawking *L'Intransigeant*. A curious mixture. . . . He has poise, talks well, seems to fill his rôle of financier. Then suddenly, he will lean over to tell you something confidentially, wink his eye and twist his mouth to one side—and you have the news-

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boy. Even his humor smacks of the street. He realizes this is noticeable but does not try to hide it.

“What I know, I don’t owe to any professors,” he confided to me the very first day out. “I entered the *Crédit Lyonnais* when I was fourteen. And not as a share-holder either.”

Since that time he has risen, he has also travelled. He has been a bank clerk in Singapore, comptroller in Saigon, banker in Siam, and now he is known throughout the Far-East. At each crossing when the habitués see him on deck they immediately wonder: “Still rich—or bankrupt?”

This time fortune is smiling on him, but how long will his millions last? No sooner will he disembark at Shanghai, than he will throw himself into one of his usual mad speculations and all he possesses may be swallowed up in a few days.

That is what his associate, Monsieur Prater, is waiting for. He stands behind Garrot, like a shark behind a raft. He knows that the broker is continually being battered about by the stronger forces in the Bourse and is always at the mercy of a fortnight’s liquidation. Since they have a common interest in at least ten important ventures he waits patiently for the crash which will allow him to buy out his partner for a song. Garrot is not blind and knows what the

other is hoping for, but he is too good a sport to show it. He takes his vengeance slowly and calmly, making his associate the butt of all his raillery and lets no opportunity pass of humiliating him in public. At the first encounter, I was rather embarrassed when this happened, but I soon grew used to it. Why waste pity on him? Everything slides off the back of that man, insults included. Prater is the billiard ball, Garrot, the cue. Which will smash first? . . .

In these Shanghaians I have at last found people who make me forget Europe. Each one a millionaire or destined to become one. And all proud of their adopted country: "Shanghai? The richest city in the world. The French circle? The finest . . . Our bar? The largest . . . Our hotels? The most comfortable . . . Our banks? The most powerful. . ."

They murmur mysterious words—the Yang-Tse with its heavy wool-laden junks, the Concessions, the racetrack, the tea houses along the Foochow Road—and as they talk their strange world seems to open before me. One of the greatest pleasures of travelling is this magic power which the mere mention of place names has to evoke mirages. Shanghai rises before my eyes—the monumental banks, department stores, trolley cars; then without transition, the other side of the surrounding wall appears—the old Chinese

city with its temples, its narrow, evil-smelling streets, its vermin, and the confused cries of soup vendors and bird sellers.

What surprises me is that my companions seem to agree on almost nothing. They all know the Far-East equally well, have travelled in the same places, and participated in the same events, and yet they all have totally different opinions on both important and trivial matters. It is only necessary for one to affirm for the other to deny. Garrot, especially, takes pleasure in these controversies. The moment his associate expresses the semblance of an opinion, he retorts with a contradiction, even if he has not entirely caught the statement. The rest is very simple; on principle, he denies everything in a wholesale manner—the politeness of the Japanese, the flavor of the mango, the tropical vegetation and even the slowness of Chinese torture. If Prater says white, he swears black. And immediately, to clinch the matter, he proposes a bet: “Ten pounds. Do you take it?”

Prater, for instance, has committed the imprudence of mentioning the sand-storms of Peking and the broker begins to laugh scornfully: “That’s not true!” he cuts in without further propriety.

The other, who is probably afraid of involving himself in an unfavorable bet, modifies his statement a bit: “The yellow wind, if you prefer.”

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"There's no such thing!" maintains the broker.

Antagonized by so much skepticism, the lawyer breaks in: "What, there's no such thing! When the sun gets all green. . ."

The broker shrugs his shoulders: "Green? Not on your life. It gets red."

It is obviously no easy matter to form an opinion. How I admire the historians who, immersed in a mass of contradictory documents, lies and errors, succeed nevertheless in establishing some sort of truth.

Prater resigns himself. Leaning back in his rocking chair, with his hands on his stomach and his feet slightly raised in the air, he looks like a huge tortoise turned over on its back. They too have this same leathery skin and these short paws. At first, I thought that he must come from the Ukraine or some Austrian ghetto, then on account of his olive skin I decided that he was rather a Levantine or perhaps a Portuguese, later I would have sworn that he came from the ends of the Caucasus; now I am no longer sure of anything. With that slave-dealer face, he cannot belong to any country.

"A Jew, that fellow? You're joking," the Pekin banker whose name is Solomon said to me with a vexed air. "They tried to say that in Shanghai, but the rabbi got furious."

That is the trouble: he is repudiated everywhere. He seems a cross between a Galician and a Bachi-Bazouk, an escaped Armenian and a Ruthenian; he is the dregs of all the bastard races, an outcast white. He accomplishes the feat of speaking all languages with a foreign accent. When he emerges from his torpor to mingle in a discussion, he usually begins by making a mistake and mumbling a few confused words in English, German or Russian; then he pulls himself into the right path and recovers his French. He speaks as slowly as Garrot talks quickly. The latter flings out his words like a handful of pennies; Prater doles them out cautiously. No matter what subject is being discussed, he dozes with vague eye and hanging lip. But as soon as a money matter is mentioned, his heavy eyelids fly open and something, intelligence perhaps, illuminates his glance.

"Prater has told you . . . *Da! Da!* Prater is certain . . ."

For he never speaks of himself but in the third person, as if to inspire respect. Prater admires himself, is grateful to himself for having risen so high; he follows his own destiny as a dog follows his master and sometimes he even doubts its reality. It seems too good. . .

"When he enters his automobile," the broker af-

firms, "he's always afraid that the chauffeur will say 'This car isn't yours.' "

How could such a man have grown rich? How could he, at the beginning of his career, have found a human being gullible enough to trust him with anything or even lend him twenty sous? It is hard to believe. This evening, he lets his friends talk to me about China and her contending masters, Pei-Fou and Tchang-So-Lin. The subject doesn't interest him. Garrot passes some satirical remarks at his expense; he makes no reply. But after the steward has rung the final dinner-gong, he follows me into the elevator.

"Nonsense!" he mumbles in English. "This Garrot is always taking me down, he wants to injure me. He's a *bezcerdtza* . . . a flint-heart, Monsieur. But I'm a kind man. *Ach!* If all those who owe Prater money would only return it! However, I prefer not to press matters."

Who knows? Perhaps it is true . . .

Wrapped in my cape, I stare up at the sky. There is no one else on the terrace of the bar and it is delightfully tranquil. It seems to me that once we emerge into the Red Sea, the stars will no longer be the same, and I am saying farewell to the ones I know.

In the last five days my life has been transformed.

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I no longer have the same pleasures, the same cares. A feeling of intoxication comes over me when I think of the unknown awaiting me—the strange countries, manners, beings, a whole book of living pictures . . . And here, I am still surrounded by the unknown: all these strangers who may still become my friends. In a reverie, I watch them file by. What discoveries or what joys do they hold for me? I scrutinize them carefully.

It is almost as if two voyages are becoming confounded in my thoughts: the one I am making and the other that I am dreaming. One gives birth to discoveries, the other to imaginings. Gradually the reality fades away and the phantoms come to life . . .

I was dreaming in this aimless fashion when the sound of singing floated up to me from the second-class deck. A man's voice. It was not difficult for me to recognize the tenor of the troupe. Did he too wish to bid farewell to the skies of France or was he only dutifully practicing his aria?

The boundless frame of the moonlit ocean night enhanced the fervent song of the invisible Werther with a poignant melancholy. The passengers stopped their promenade and gathered quickly into little groups. "Sh . . . sh," they chided, as some people came out of the bar.

"Werther!" someone whispered.

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All ears and all hearts strained to the singing. Each identified some of his own melancholy with the plaintive air. "Werther! It's Werther!" And they said it not as if they were speaking about the hero of a play, but as if they were really naming someone, a real man . . . Then as the strange voice died away on the water, I seemed to see the singer, in the guise of one I already knew: tall, sombre, dressed in black, with a scar on his chin.

PORT SAÏD

METALLIC pylons, cranes, coal-barges, the wretched hovels peculiar to all arid lands, and a whole swarm of small craft with the *Arbis* brawling above the din: Port Saïd.

We landed about two o'clock. All the passengers crowded over to the gang-plank exit, but as the steamer could not touch dock, row-boats had to be used to bridge the hot, narrow channel, and the crossing took a long while. As they prepared to descend the swinging accommodation-ladder, the women hesitated, and uttered frightened little cries.

"Well, we're not ashore yet by a long shot," said the broker who had offered me his services as cicerone.

These manoeuvres were not expedited by the confusion of barks, all trying to pass first and getting their oars caught while the rowers shouted frantically. The crew handled the passengers the same way they do in a ship-wreck, except that now they did

not waste any time in drowning them, it was simpler to pass them into the boats. The canoes went off fully-laden, with the delighted women laughing already in anticipation of all they were going to see. They were dressed as for a promenade in the Bois de Boulogne, and there were some whom I could hardly recognize, so changed were they by their hats.

“Look!” the broker said to me, “there’s the best of the lot.”

And he pointed out a pretty girl in a mauve dress whom I had never seen before. She had stopped short with her foot on the last step of the ladder, clinging with one hand on the rung and with the other to a sailor, and gazed in terror at the canoe into which she had to jump.

“Come on, don’t be afraid!” cried her friends who were already seated. She tried hard, but just as she advanced one foot, her courage failed, and she drew back with a cry. As she felt all eyes fixed upon her, she lost her head completely and having recoiled once more, began to laugh nervously, still clinging tightly to the sailor’s arm. “Pardon me, I’m so afraid! . . .” The bewildered face she turned towards us seemed to plead. The men laughed their amusement, but the women passengers held up behind her began to manifest impatience.

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"Go ahead! Get a move on!" some bolder ones shouted over the railing.

Then, in desperation, she must have shut her eyes and jumped, plump into the arms of a tall young man whose face I could not distinguish.

"Bravo!" came the ironic cry from all sides.

She sat down in the stern of the boat, looking quite proud of her feat, and gaily adjusted her scarf. As the boat moved off, someone called out from behind:

"O, what a coward!"

The remark did not seem to anger her. She went off laughing, searching for the person who had directed the rebuke; then quite unexpectedly, instead of a reply she began to sing:

*"Ah! mon cousin, pardonnez-moi,
Pardonnez un instant d'émoi . . ."*

Manon! . . . At the first note we all understood, everyone had recognized the voice: it was Manon, the prima donna of the company. I gazed at her, captivated. She looked like a fresh bouquet of mauve and gold blooming in the little boat.

"Je suis encor tout étourdie . . ."

Her soft, exquisite voice soared into the heavens unhesitatingly, like the joyous flight of a bird. The

entire ship had grown silent to listen, and the negro coal-dealers who had been squabbling over customers, stopped short in astonishment.

*“Pardonnez à mon bavardage
J’en suis à mon premier voyage.”*

On the last note the bravos burst forth. There was a ringing ovation from the crowded decks to the swarming wharf.

“Encore!” cried the officers from the top of the bridge. Even the grimy stokers acclaimed her from the port-holes. Embarrassed, the singer effaced herself behind one of her companions, and thanked them gracefully by blowing a kiss.

“She’s perfectly ridiculous,” said someone behind me.

I turned around. It was Mlle. Nicolai again, with her severe little face framed in the glowing disk of a parasol.

Garrot looked at her with no goodwill: “Madoiselle, a pretty woman is never ridiculous”, he replied dryly. And pushed me into the canoe.

After we have passed the customs and shaken off the money-changers who jingle their piastres at us, we enter the main street where the passengers are streaming down, all classes mingled together. Everybody is there, for debarkations are a special holiday

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on ocean travels. The women go into ecstasies at the sight of the first Arab: "How funny he is!"

Funny, yes, but no more . . . Port Saïd can hardly be called a city, it is neither Europe nor Asia nor Africa; it is a transition spot, the mouth of the canal between three continents, an intermediary bazaar where the traveller may get his bearings. Imagine Port Saïd as a filter between two continents with the dirt sticking to it.

There are more stores than houses: jewellers, confectioners, bookshops, Oriental tobacco shops, displays of melons and fruits, money-changing booths. But best of all are the large show-cases displaying all kinds of Egyptian rubbish—copper vases, rugs, damascened weapons, lamps, gold-spangled nets, all the atrocities that no one would buy in Paris, but which are snapped up over here because "it's native stuff." Now that they are here at last, the travellers halt in astonishment: the Orient of their dreams is for sale.

The entire population has turned out and lies in wait for us. Boot-blacks, vendors of loukoums and flowers, pimps, all make up a sordid horde deafening you with its cries, maddening you with its incessant entreaties. The shop-keepers mingle with them and accost you: "This way, Monsieur Colonel! . . . Here you are, French lady. . . ."

An old, bearded Egyptian with one eye and a face eaten away by an ulcer has approached Garrot and is trying to slip a package of picture postcards into his hand, repeating in a raucous voice: "Obscene, obscene . . ."

These tattered hawkers swarm about like flies. With horrible leers, they all show you the same little packages which they hide under their rags: "Obscene cards . . ." You may be sitting on the terrace of a café and congratulating yourself on your escape, when suddenly, you are attacked again by bare-foot scamps who try to shine your shoes by force and are effectively dispersed only by the Egyptian police who drag them off by the ears.

You see all manner of people in these swarming streets,—Greeks, Levantines, Arabs, Egyptians, Syrians, Turks, a veritable residue of all the races, the dregs of Oriental riffraff, and the dreadful results of crossings between half-breed negroes and Tcherkesses. What horrible diseases can have eaten away their faces in this manner? They are as naturally cankerous as the Kaffir is thick-lipped or the Papuan fuzzy-haired. It is part of their type. The sole nobility are the mysterious Bedouins, dressed in black, whose veiled faces allow nothing to be seen but two large eyes and a sort of copper-wire coil which covers the top of the nose up to the eyebrows. All the cos-

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tumes look alike: the tarbooshs, caftans, veils, turbans, and especially those tattered garments which may once have been either white or black, burnoos or gallabia—one can no longer tell. The national costume of Port Saïd is rags.

Garrot had visited Port Saïd more than twenty times and was therefore less curious than I was, being much more interested in the people from the boat, with whom he stopped to converse every now and then. He wanted to drag me into a store where he thought he had seen the band of artistes enter, but this time I protested. "Mauve doesn't become you," I told him laughingly.

And I drew him away by the arm. A little farther on, as I stood staring at a window display, he called my attention to two men who were seated in front of a shop drinking Turkish coffee. Merchant and client looked so alike—the same olive complexion, the same heavy toad's eyelids, and the same voracious mouths—that at first I did not notice that one of them was Prater. They were talking earnestly. The broker looked at them for a moment and then said to me with a trace of admiration:

"It's amazing how he can manage even that kind of customer. They're pretty canny . . ."

As we passed the shop, the broker tapped his associate on the shoulder and pointed out a passing

streetcar, a worm-eaten box just big enough for a few verminous wretches and drawn by two scabby, tottering mules.

"A business opportunity!" he whispered in his bantering way. "You buy up all the materials, mules, and lice and launch a company: *Streetcar Corporation of Port Saïd* . . . Some good publicity and the title-deeds automatically increase in value . . . Doesn't that give you an idea?"

Prater raised his head. "We've already bought up the worst ones," he replied stolidly. Then, glancing side-ways at the broker, he added: "And I made money out of it, old boy."

This news irritated Garrot. "That's natural," he answered in a cutting voice, "you have a genius for dirty business." And with this compliment, he started off, without even saying goodbye.

"It's certainly going to be hard," he confided to me a few minutes later, "to begin business again with that rogue . . . He's so crooked."

This time the impulse was too strong for me: "Then why did you ever take him on as an associate?"

A shrug of his shoulder and a vague gesture was his answer. "Oh, well . . . circumstances," he murmured.

He must have taken up with this Prater during some financial crisis or when he needed capital to

put a deal through, and since then they had become so tied up in various contracts, investments, obligations, and defeasances, that they could not be separated without leaving some part of themselves behind. In the carriage which bore us along at a leisurely pace, Garrot began to confide in me, and bit by bit, one confidence leading to another, he finished by telling me bluntly what he thought of his confederate:

"A toad . . . He's just waiting for a chance to catch me without ready money one fine day and squeeze me dry. And I'll tell you what a tough bird he is . . . He's tried everything he could to get me. He's even put money into impossible combinations and tried to persuade me to go in with him so that I should lose my shirt . . . Nice fellow, isn't he? Soon as there's a dangerous risk on the Bourse he eggs me on to take it. At the French Circle, he's done everything possible to make me play big stakes again, as I used to do . . . He throws all sorts of banana peels in my path with a careless air. So, as you can well imagine, I'm on my guard."

For once, the broker had dropped his mocking indifference and grown peevish. "He's jealous, you understand," he continued. "Jealous of my position in Shanghai, of my brokerage profession, my mistresses, my house. Even the fact that I'm a Frenchman must make him sweat with envy."

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“Where does he come from?”

Garrot broke out again into his rusty laugh. “Where? From nowhere . . . Wherever there’s money about, there’s his home. They say that he was born in Austria, naturalized in England, and has lived a long time in Russia, but you can’t believe any of that. Do you know how I met him? It’s a good story . . . It was in Shanghai during the war. The Russian government had made some big deals with the Chinese and I was commissioned to take charge of the payments and see that the goods were delivered as specified. Well, one day this Prater turns up, with his hanging lip and sleepy air and begins to talk to me about an order of six hundred thousand pairs of boots for the Russian army, one-third kid, and two-thirds calf-skin. I wondered what he was driving at, but he didn’t leave me in the dark very long. The kid boots cost four dollars, the calf-skin eight; he made me a simple proposition to deliver them all in kid, and split the difference. A thorough rascal, you see . . . You don’t know me very well yet, but you can imagine the effect his proposition had on me. Especially since it was war-time. I got up and told the good man to take the shortest way out. Do you think he budged? Not he . . . Just stood there as calmly as you saw him drinking his Turkish coffee just now . . . He looked at me in

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great surprise, as if I had failed to grasp his meaning, and when I let him get a word in said to me in his best accent:

“What, you’re working for the Boches? . . .”

“This time, I assure you, I was just struck dumb. Then he continued, as if he were teaching me a lesson:

“‘You’re a business man, aren’t you? Well, so am I. For us, the war isn’t a sentimental matter; it’s an enterprise where we have to look ahead. Well, I know the Russian army, you don’t. I tell you that their arsenals are empty, they haven’t any guns or cartridges, the soldiers go to the front armed with sticks. So if I sell them your famous calf-skin boots, do you know what will happen? After a half hour’s fighting all the Russians will be killed and the Germans will capture their boots. That’s what you’ll do with your principles—you’ll reprovision the Prussians!’

“I’m not easily flabbergasted, but I can assure you that I was dumfounded that time. So dumfounded that I didn’t even throw him down the stairs. I simply refused his offer and he went off, not at all angry, thinking I was an imbecile.

“But you haven’t heard the best part of the story . . . To supervise this boot supply they had sent a big souse of a general who was happy as long

as you called him 'Your Honor', and who was totally incapable, even when sober, of distinguishing between leather and blotting-paper. Prater grasped the proper method of handling him immediately, presented some samples, and the whole order was accepted in one lot. It was just as well, however. Because six months later, just as the scamp had predicted, the Russians were defeated and all the boots fell into the hands—or rather the feet—of the Boches. Fortunately, my outburst of honesty had been of no avail, and they were all kid. If I had had my say there would have been calf-skin ones. . . .”

It was hard for me to understand how Garrot had taken up with this rogue after such an introduction, but I did not inquire further. I was not paying close attention anyway. Our carriage moved painfully through these crowded streets and all the bells that the driver could ring did not disturb the easy saunter of the natives. We recognized fellow passengers at every turn. Port Saïd had been thrown open to them like a huge amusement park and their rôle consisted in giving away money to the shop-keepers, money-changers, beggars, and boot-blacks who were already waiting for the next boat.

Keenly interested, I looked about. From time to time the broker would stop talking, give an order to the driver, and we would turn into another street,

as miserable as the first. Port Saïd is a city newly-born and already decrepit, like the children of the very aged. Houses which are barely ten years old are dirty and tottering, with wooden balconies and black façades; and the luxurious villas of the rich remind you of those exposition palaces which from the moment they are set up seem to be awaiting the pick-axe of the wreckers.

My guide looked at nothing. Absorbed in his personal history, he was prattling about ancient grudges: "Wait till you see my home in Shanghai. Two elevators, a heated swimming pool, a winter-garden with camelias . . . Well, Prater was dying of jealousy and tried to do better. I had spent sixty thousand dollars, so he laid out seventy-five thousand. And for what? . . . A sort of bazaar with false coromandels and imitation Buddhas. No such rubbish in my house: everything in Gothic!"

His sidewise glance seemed to seek my approbation, but I was non-committal. The walk which he had made me take from the casino to the governor's palace, and from the rue du Commerce to the water-works, was beginning to put me in a bad humor. Was there nothing else to be seen? I was beginning to think so when, at the corner of the boulevard, the ship's doctor appeared before our carriage.

"Well!" he cried, waving his long arms, "are you

satisfied? The mirage of the Orient, the land of the Pharaohs . . . Have you seen enough?"

His face grew radiant at the thought of my disillusionment and he looked as if he were keeping himself from laughing at me. "Well, it's horrible enough, isn't it?" he continued with a triumphant air.

Garrot felt his virtues as a guide disparaged, and he began to enumerate the places that he had taken me to. The doctor frowned.

"Is that all? But he hasn't seen the best part yet."

Without asking our consent, he jumped into the rickety carriage and hurled an order to the driver. "Ah, I'm in luck!" he said, rubbing his hands together. "My poor friend, you were going to miss the most important thing. You want exoticism, eh? Well, that's what I'm going to show you!"

A wicked joy flamed in his small gray eyes and he chewed the end of his moustaches with grimaces even more comical than ever. He was certainly enjoying himself. He made us turn our backs resolutely on the rue du Nil, the banks, the tobacco-vendors, and directed our carriage straight to the native quarter. There I found plenty to see. . . .

The lower part of Port Saïd is merely hideous, the upper part is filthy. This native quarter is to the rest of the city as the rag-pickers' section is to Paris: a labyrinth of foul alleys, a leper-city of hovels lean-

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ing one against the other for support, an outskirts whose capitol should be an asylum. No palm trees—just sickly posts manufacturing sap out of sand and dust. Almost naked street-urchins, with sore eyes and wasted arms, playing in dirty pools of stagnant water . . . Sick beggars, skinny donkeys, their wounds swarming with gad-flies, evil-looking cafés with Arab charcoal-sellers bawling at the entrances, emaciated goats chewing imaginary cud, old harpies in tatters, and floating above all this a horrible odor, an indescribable stench which rises not so much from the accumulated filth as from twenty open-air kitchens where full cauldrons of mutton fat are seething.

Near the docks the merchants pursued one. But here they have nothing to sell—the beggars have only their sores, the children their squalor, the girls their skins. The gateway to the Orient is a kitchen sink.

The doctor did not question me: my expression was response enough for him. Gesticulating wildly from his seat, he gloated: “There’s putrefaction for you! Is it foul enough? . . .”

Afraid that I might miss something he kept pointing out things to the right and left—here a butcher-shop, the blood-stained blocks alive with green flies, there a dismal bakery displaying pale loaves which looked like so many eruptions; he spared me no filth or living monstrosity. His jubilation was be-

coming lyrical. He summoned the miserable creatures as we passed, calling them by their diseases:

"Come here, lupus! You deserve at least twenty sous . . . Look at that ophthalmia! He's already blind in one eye, the other's on its way . . . And what perfect scrofula! My God, just look at it!"

He was ecstatic, his joy was at its zenith. Surely, he could find nothing better. Ah, but there were still the girls . . .

"You'll get an eyeful!" he promised us. "If it's exoticism you're after. . . ."

He had only to motion to the coachman, the man knew the road. Lashing with his whip at the poor brats who encumbered our path, he set at a brisk pace through the stinking streets. Hideous old whore-masters in fezzes besieged our carriage.

"Arabian women!" they cried in their raucous voices.

"French girls!" bawled another, evidently mistaking us for Englishmen. Behind them, some more hawkers began to chase us. "Obscene! Obscene!" they repeated, brandishing their bundles of post cards.

Then we were assailed by a blind man led by a Bedouin girl with a tattooed chin who squeaked: "For Mohammed!" Her immediate occupation was begging, but she could do other things: ask any of

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the solicitors . . . The driver again struck at the urchins trotting beside the carriage. At last the doctor recognized the place he sought.

"Stop! Here it is."

Immediately another blackguard in a tarboosh head-dress jumped on the running-board. "Yes, here," he whispered, "Arabian women . . ."

All the vices, all the corruption in the world were written on that face. The broker and I hesitated, but our companion had already jumped out: "Come on, follow me!" he ordered.

Should we run away? Oh, no! That would be cheating the doctor of his crowning triumph, the glorious finish to his fire-works.

"You'll never find its equal anywhere in the world," he assured us, as if referring to some unique pagoda.

"Little women from Paris!" panted the Egyptian member of the crew who had just caught up with us.

But the doctor repulsed the ironical offer with a gesture. "No French girls," he declaimed impressively. "Odalisques, Sultanas, Fatimas! . . . We're looking for local color, you understand. Bring on your mirage!"

He was already radiant at the prospect of what lay in store for us. We could not possibly leave him now. We walked in.

What a sorry-looking debauch! . . . A sort of

barracks smoking-room, then a rose-papered parlor decorated with calendar advertisements and mirrors as dull as the eyes of the blind. At the summons of the Italian matron, in trooped a pitiful flock of fallen creatures—the riffraff of all the ports in the world, abandoned camp-followers with hollow chests, lashless eyes, bloated skins, all rigged out in kimonos, transparent chemises, and figleaf aprons.

“How about a drink? . . . Don’t you want to see the dances? . . . Coming upstairs?”

From the houses close by reinforcements came running through the streets—half-naked, their kimonos flying—and even the children did not laugh at them, so accustomed had they grown to the sight of these wretches. Then the miracle: two genuine Arabian girls arrived, bastards of street-porters, coarse-skinned and emaciated to the bone; but they stretched out their long beggar-arms towards us, clamoring like the rest for their glass of tepid beer.

Hail, fair Arabians! Exotic passion! . . .

More benign than any Pasha, the doctor sprawled out on his bench, passing the dilapidated harem in review.

“Well, isn’t this worth the trip? The accursed voluptuousness of Port Saïd, the monstrous embraces, the demoniac visions: here they are, gentlemen! The capital of vice? You’re in it . . . Take a good look

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at it: here it is! . . .” And with a disdainful wave of the hand he presented us to the cattle.

I gazed, ashamed, leaden-hearted, wishing only for escape, and was grateful to Garrot who made the first move, after he had thrown several shillings on the table.

“All the same,” he remarked acrimoniously to the doctor when we got outside, “as long as you know Port Saïd so well, you might have taken us to the mosque, it’s more interesting.”

They were on the verge of a dispute over the respective merits of the two attractions, when we perceived the Fat Little Man coming out of a neighboring bordello, his camera strapped across his back. Upon recognizing us he turned pale. At first he pretended not to see us, then thinking better of it, came up with a pitiful attempt at a smile.

“You’re taking a walk, aren’t you?” he said. “Well, so am I. Funny coincidence, isn’t it? By the way, don’t tell my wife that you met me here. I want to surprise her . . .”

This singular excuse quite floored us. A surprise? Perhaps he intended to make her a birthday present of these sirens’ photographs? We were charitable enough not to press him and offered him a place in the carriage.

“No,” he replied, “I’m on my way to the city to

keep an appointment with the director. I'm to snap him and all his troupe on the terrace of the cafe."

Garrot seized the opportunity. "I'll go along," he said. "I've gotten enough amusement out of this country's curiosities."

We let them go and the doctor and I drove off toward the mosque. The white edifice with the minaret was no better than the other sights. The curiosity of the Europeans had profaned it, their money had besmirched everything, and the present Muphti was merely a figure-head like all the others. The formality of removing one's shoes at the entrance was dispensed with: the inconvenience might hurt trade. It sufficed to slip some straw babouches over the muddy shoes. The essential thing is that you pay.

It was still light when we entered the mosque but night had already fallen when we emerged. "For Mohammed," whined the beggars. Then to their aid came the whole flock of boot-blacks, solicitors, and old hawkers, offering their rubbish all over again.

Every shop was illuminated, and the streets were brilliant with the continuous glare of display windows. The city buzzed like a huge department store.

"Beautiful rugs, Monsieur Colonel . . . loukoums, cigarettes. . . ."

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The shop-keepers lay in wait for the passengers on their way back to the boat and followed them shamelessly, stopping them in the middle of the street to pull them by the arm. If, thinking to elude one, you asked for the most unlikely object, he would answer stolidly: "I have it, Monsieur," and drag you into his shop to show you no matter what. This was the fashionable hour for "society" to display itself—men only. Optimistic butterflies of the evening . . . They passed by in carriages, their strained and smug faces smeared with a noxious yellow grease, carelessly dangling their walking-sticks, and wearing stiff tarbooshes instead of hats. They had the open carriages proceed slowly so that they might ogle at ease the European ladies whom their eyes devoured with glances as sticky as their honey cakes.

The terraces of the big cafés were crowded with tourists shouting with laughter at the antics of the native conjurers who drew little chicks out of their ears, while they repeated their incessant cry of "Gala, Gala, Gala . . ."

The rue du Commerce was a continuous stream of passengers marching towards the steamer, laden with absurd bundles of inedible sweets and worthless souvenirs. When we arrived at the port quarter we found it even more animated than before, filled with a throng of donkeys, verminous horses, exhausted col-

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liers, and vendors of sugar-cane. In the midst of the Oriental clamor where children's cries mingled with the shouts of the Arabs and the shrill calls of the peddlers, I could occasionally distinguish the sharp skirl of a bag-pipe or the jingle of a tambourine. They were dancing down there in that black alley. The native cafés expelled a stream of penniless wretches, gulping their booty as they sailed out.

I raised my head at the sound of a long drawn-out wail coming from the roof-tops. Without realizing it, we had regained the street in front of the mosque, and the cry that I heard was the voice of the muezzin. It was the hour of meditation . . . But I could not believe that he was really calling this noisy market-place to prayer. In the tumult of bells, yelpings, and horns, it seemed to me that, from his minaret, he, like the others, was bawling: "Obscene! Obscene! . . ."

WHEN we came back to our steamer, at dinner time, the stokers had just finished loading the coal. In the cruel light of the arc-lamps we could still see the Arabs and negroes haggling over their customers, bellying as they filled thin baskets and dove into the yawning port-holes as into the jaws of Hell. On the promenade decks the natives had spread out their trumpery wares, forming a picturesque fair where

the ladies gained amusement from fingering the necklaces of yellow pearls, the many-hued cotton fabrics and the gold-spangled scarves, while the men contented themselves with the blond tobacco.

But it was on the terrace that the laughter rang loudest. A circle of onlookers had formed around an Egyptian conjurer who declaimed "Gala, Gala," in a pompous nasal voice and kept on bewildering the passengers by making watches disappear, finding a pack of cards spread out under the jacket of the astonished Englishman, and slipping a ring over a cane while someone grasped both ends. We found Garrot at the head of the group, surrounded by five or six artistes who were already treating him like an old friend. Near him, I immediately remarked the lovely lady in mauve, laughing gaily. The broker had not been mistaken: she was very pretty. Perhaps about thirty, her blond freshness had taken recourse to a little artifice, a shadow of blue on her eyelids, a touch of rouge, a bit of powder; nevertheless, I was struck by her air of extreme youth, as if the astonishing loveliness of her eyes and the girlish freshness of her lips had in themselves the power of controlling time.

The conjurer had just drawn a chick from her dress and she was laughing wildly, full-throated like an amorous pigeon.

"Again!" ordered the broker, handing a piece of money to the Egyptian. The fellow thanked him with grimaces and servile bows; then, rolling up the sleeves of his gallabia to his elbows, he brought forth another chick which he discovered this time in the singer's hat. The flustered little animal, deposited on the floor, ran away chirping.

"I want it!" cried Manon, running after it. "I'll take good care of it."

"Then it will surely be dead tomorrow," facetiously remarked one of her comrades.

Garrot had ordered champagne, and when the "Gala, Gala" had departed, they all sat down to drink. A plump brunette with huge black eyes and too much make-up seemed to take great pleasure in the company of the Shanghaian. She laughed heartily at his stories, teased him, and exchanged glasses, while Florence Bernard, now silent, glanced at her reproachfully. Garrot was in his element, reveling in his success, the eternal smile playing at the corner of his mouth. Passing near the table, I overheard the brunette say to him in an awestruck voice: "How rich you must be!"

Then the doctor, who had not left my side, pulled at my coat: "Come on," he said, "he's starting to make love to her. . . ."

And we left them.

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THAT evening our steamer weighed anchor and cut right through the luminous path of the canal, bordered with large beacon lights. There were other boats about us taking on coal. The huge statue of de Lesseps which dominated the port could no longer be distinguished. Squatting on the sandy bank the city was all aflame; it was destined to pass the night thus, for an English liner had just pulled in. The stores would be busy all night, the solicitors also and the beggars, conjurers and girls. Perhaps even the muezzin . . .

"Sell or starve," quoted Prater, who at times achieved a sort of unconscious humor.

The broker was gayer than ever this evening; I knew the reason, and he was anxious to impart it to everyone else, for the moment coffee was served, he began telling us about his new friends.

"It's a shame they're not travelling with us in first," he said regretfully. "It would be so much more fun. They're charming people. And Manon! You've no idea how adorable she is."

He was in such good humor that he forgot his annoyance of the afternoon and began to joke with his associate. "You missed her while you were negotiating with your dear childhood playmates. She's much prettier than the rug merchants in the rue du Commerce, I can assure you."

Prater, who was smoking a cigar, sucking it between his thick lips, now opened one eye. "No," he said sedately, "Prater did not see Manon, but he spent an enjoyable few minutes with Werther. Didn't the young lady mention him to you? He's her lover, you know . . . Jacques Largy's his name. And he's a very handsome fellow, intelligent, and very—well-mannered," he finished in English. "Yes, as polite as only a true Frenchman can be."

That got under the broker's skin. His narrow little eyes sharpened, and he stared at the other maliciously. "I suppose you immediately offered him a position," he jeered.

"No," replied Prater. "Let him keep what he has. . . ."

Garrot could not bear to think that his associate was getting the better of him. To save his face, he affected nonchalance.

"Oh well, we'll wait and see. Women are so capricious . . . They probably won't even get off at Saigon together."

Prater pursed his lips with exasperating calm. "A bet?" he proposed.

This time the broker lost his temper. "Let me alone with your bets! I'm not like you; I don't see nothing but money everywhere."

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Prater held his tongue. When the storm was over, he continued in the same calm tone: "Speaking of bets, you owe me a pound. We anchored after noon." Then, with his eyes on the ceiling: "Do you know what the pound's worth today?"

MANON AND WERTHER

IN the morning the passengers stuck their heads out of the port-holes, and seeing that they were only a short distance from the banks of the canal, exclaimed: "Why, we're still in the same place. . . ."

What had happened? Had the Suez Canal prolonged itself immeasurably while we slept? No . . . miracles have ceased happening here since the time of Moses. It was only that the steamer had been caught in a fog, and to avoid collision with the bank, had been forced to spend the rest of the night between Tineh and Kantara, instead of reaching the big lake.

Curious as a child, I immediately stuck my head outside. "The desert . . . I am in the desert" I repeated the words softly to convince myself, but I did not quite succeed. In my innocence I was expecting a vast stretch of flat sand the color of the beach—like the illustrations in an elementary geography—and I discovered to my great discomfort that the desert was neither flat nor yellow. It was, on the con-

trary, a surge of high dunes, a succession of arid hills, a few thorn bushes and blades of dry grass growing here and there, with the sun painting this setting in the most blinding white. Did the atlas lie too?

Impatient to get up on deck, I dressed hastily. For the first time, the cold shower was caressing instead of stinging.

"It feels good to have a bit of heat," said the Fat Little Man to me gaily as I passed him in the corridor.

Overnight the seasons have changed. Yesterday it was winter, now suddenly it is summer. As soon as Port Saïd is passed we no longer shiver, we suffocate. The deck which has been almost deserted up to this time is suddenly filled with strange passengers stretched out on their steamer-chairs. Where have all these people been hiding? Behind the heavy luggage in the storage-hold? No more scarves, no more coats or furs: nothing but colonial pith-helmets and white costumes. Everything has blossomed during the night. All along the port-side of the promenade deck the sailors have unrolled the blinds to keep out the glare of the sun, but it penetrates even through the thick shutters and the hand-railing is fire to the touch. The ship's officers have discarded their blue uniforms for linen jackets, the electric fans have been started,

the bar-man has opened his ice-cream stand: we are entering the tropics.

As soon as they spy the first passengers, the tarboosh-capped vendors, who were thought safe on shore, reappear on the deck, emerging mysteriously from the hatch-ways. "Beautiful bracelets, French lady! . . . Pretty, pretty . . . Cigarettes, Monsieur Colonel! . . ."

The deck steward is flabbergasted. Only last night he had chased them away with a few judicious kicks and conducted them right up to the stern ladder, and here they are again this morning! Impossible to get rid of them. We carry them away from Port Saïd along with the fleas.

"Loukoums . . . Cigarettes . . ."

Their baskets slung over their arms, and their necklaces hanging ready from their wrists, they start to harass the women, counting on their idleness to make them buy anything, and once more the bargaining begins. We won't be rid of them until we cross another steamer which will take them back home.

"Oh! the scamps!" cries the enraged purser. "Come on, see that they're all cleared out of here!"

Yes, indeed. You may chase them out of one side, but they pop back on the other. They have to be led, one by one, to the stern where their canoes are moored, and when a native skiff which is going back

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to shore finally does appear, they have to be put aboard by force. The most tenacious of them all is an old Levantine who promenades his date-stone rosaries with complete indifference, seemingly unaware that the whole crew is at his heels. No sooner has he been thrown down a ladder than he emerges from a hatch-way; conducted to the rear with the others, a second later finds him squatting at the entrance to the saloon. The deck steward has called two sailors to his aid for at least moral support—but to no avail. When they have ejected the pest from the port-side he reappears on the starboard, clinking the strings of his pious merchandise and repeating nasally: “Beautiful souvenir, Madame!”

In final exasperation, the lieutenant himself interferes and you hear thundering menaces, some well-directed kicks, and definite injunctions never to be seen on board again. But even while the lieutenant is reading on the second-class deck, the wretch has already calmly made his appearance at the bar, his long skinny arms draped with the rosary chains.

Really to secure peace, you would have to shove him off the forecastle with a stone around his neck. And even then, I’m not sure but that he would emerge dripping from the water, with his basket on his hand and climb up on deck to try to sell the stone.

"You see," the broker remarks dryly, "Prater still has several things to learn."

Like all the others, we are lying prostrate on our steamer-chairs, crushed by this first day of heat, lethargically watching the landscape drift by. The tourist no longer promenades; all movement is confined to the flying shores.

On the African coast a tiny railroad follows the length of the canal. Does that ridiculous-looking toy really function? Against the two open sides of the station they have gravely planted some trellis to guard the entrance to the platform. Close by, the desert begins . . . What unlikely traveller without a ticket do they hope to keep out? An unscrupulous Bedouin or strayed dromedary?

Some overseers who have spied the boat come out of their cottages, the native excavators stop digging; the naked Arabs work steadily on their dredging-machines. The Europeans greet us with a loud shrill whistle, and our Englishmen unceremoniously reply by means of two fingers stuck in their mouths.

Lying at ease in my light linen suit, I smile up at the sun, happy to be alive.

"Take care," says the doctor's voice to me. "Put on your dark spectacles."

He points to the sky, a burning golden-gray. "Look

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at that . . . You can't even lift your eyes without hurting yourself. A damnable country!"

I make no reply. My mind is elsewhere. In the distance I glimpse the salt-marshes spreading their blinding water surfaces, and some ibis that fly away, frightened by the noon-day siren. On the imperceptible tracks which fade into the dunes, some melancholy camels appear, led by Arabs in burnouses; they are so satisfactorily picturesque that you suspect them of being fakes. A moment ago the desert was white, suddenly it has turned as golden as the sun. I gaze in wonderment. Two continents can be encompassed in a single glance. To the west lies Africa—palm trees that might be carved out of zinc, some tufts of reten or tarfa, and in the far distance, the flowering queen of an oasis. To the east is Asia—an even wilder desert, with only the cloudy summit of a mountain visible on the horizon. But before this green boundary of canal was scooped out, where did Africa begin, and where Asia?

I will get no enlightenment from the doctor. He has cornered the old American, rigged out this morning in an astonishing colonial helmet with a long green projective vizor, and is airing his demoralizing opinions.

"I find that travelling makes me lose all notion of the seasons," he is telling him. "Can you believe

it, one Christmas-day in Djibouti I almost died of sun-stroke. . . .”

IN spite of the whirling electric-fans and the open port-holes you suffocate in the dining-room. Having left half my meal untouched, I hasten to get upon deck early in order to secure my place at the bar. The passengers look entirely different to me now in their tropical attire. Some are improved and others seem worse. For example, I prefer the Solitary Lady in her Paris clothes. With bare neck and arms, she has nothing left with which to practice those alluring and almost imperceptible, coquettish gestures—a manner of arranging her scarf, or burying her face in her furs,—and she seems to be stripped of her charm. The Pekin banker however, does not show any consciousness of the fact. He has not left her side since early morning and now, having transported her chair to the shady port-side, he is hovering over her with solicitous gestures. He is not, like the rest of us, dressed simply in linen: he sports an outfit of Tussah-silk which all the women admire and all the men covet. Even the young Nicolai has remarked it:

“He really knows how to dress,” I heard her say as she passed near me.

She looks better in this light. You see nothing of her white silhouette but the black of her plastered

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hair and the shadow of her eyes. Wearing neither smoked glasses nor a hat to protect her from the glaring sun, she paces the deck with her boyish stride, swinging her thin, sun-burnt arms.

As usual, my Shanghai friends are talking business, I listen and learn . . . I like the conversation of these banking people—perhaps merely on account of their rare and incomprehensible lingo.

“He was a good cambist,” says Garrot. “But once separated from his counting table . . .”

More snatches: “A bullish market . . . A corner . . .”

And the Pekin banker who has rejoined them: “I was prudent. I was in for some six hundred thousand francs, but I took my loss and covered myself with dollars.”

I catch the words on the wing, like flies. Everything I overhear upsets my preconceptions. I discover the gap between finance and geography. Money is a conqueror that has remoulded the world to its own idea, and yet this all-powerful authority does not figure on any map. Why is the Austrian thaler, discarded a long time ago in Vienna, now current in Ethiopia? And why is the Mexican dollar the monetary unit of Shanghai? Mystery! . . .

These men of money are prophets in their way.

They read the stock quotations like tea-leaves: "The pound will go down, but the dollar hasn't hit its high point yet. . . ."

Now the conversation grows bitter. Garrot is reproaching his associate for having made money on the last rise of the pound. And not really because he mixes his patriotism with finance—money knows no country—but because anything Prater may do evokes his partner's disapproval.

"Naturally, you don't care a rap how low the franc falls. It's not your country . . ."

The other draws in his head and curls himself into a ball like a hedgehog. The curio-dealer, the one whom we call the Chinaman on account of his complexion and thin, drooping moustaches, cannot abide any strong talk. Immediately he humps his back and rises:

"I'm going to take a siesta," he informs us.

We know what the "siesta" means: twenty-five pipefuls of opium. Every afternoon, as you pass by his cabin, he is betrayed by the smell of the drug; the old American is so shocked that he refuses to greet the culprit. No drugs for him—he prefers to drink.

Prater has buried his nose in a sheaf of papers and, code-book open before him, begins to decipher his radio messages. But Garrot will not leave him in peace.

"I assure you that he imagines himself a prince of finance. Don't you, Prater? He thinks that when he's seasick, the pound drops."

I thought at first that the associate was immune to these sarcasms, but now I know better. They make him suffer. Not so much on account of his sensitiveness, I think, as because of his pride.

"Everyone's against me; they want to take away my reputation," he confided to me on deck after the broker had been riding him. "And yet Prater doesn't owe anything to anybody, he's worked all his life. If they need money for anything, they get it from Prater. If they find themselves in a tight fix, they come running to the kind Prater. He's always on the spot for that, poor fellow! But afterwards, all they want is to throw him out quickly. It's dirty money, Prater's . . . It's underhand business, his . . . No matter . . . *Immer feste d'rauf* . . ."

I could never understand, moreover, why, since they get along so badly, they take their vacations at the same time and travel together; but Garrot explains it to me with a wink.

"Leave him behind in Shanghai? I'm not so dumb . . . On my return I'd find my whole business ruined and my sweet friend installed in my place."

And, as Prater, on his side, has the same suspi-

cions, they both keep putting off their vacations, each hoping that the other will leave first and so they always finish by sailing on the same steamer.

"They're too fond of each other," our Chinaman says. "They can't bear to separate. . . ."

Leaving them with the Creole's husband and the bank director from Saigon who is gaily retailing the latest divorce scandal, I draw my chair close to the rail, lazily stretch my feet out on it, and resume my trip in the desert. Viewed in this fashion there is nothing terrifying about it. A visible track, some startled wading-birds flying away, a green clump of cactus, a distant line of palm-trees swaying on the horizon, are all that is needed to touch with life this immense and desolate stretch. Somewhere on the Asiatic bank begins the Badiet-el-Tih, the Desert of Death, which even the Bedouins fear. Is it possible? In my mind's eye, I can still see the roofs and gardens of Ismailia, and the wide avenue which seems imbedded in the thick foliage.

I gaze at the sands stretching out in an endless bare expanse and at the huge patches of mud from which the heat arises as from a lime-kiln. In some places, the yellow dunes are moulded to perfectly even heights, as symmetrical as gigantic camel humps. And where is this chimerical caravan going? . . . To refresh itself at the canal whose green waters assume

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the translucencies of emerald? No, indeed, the desert does not seem so very sad to me. . . .

But if I were to ask that pale engineer waving his handkerchief at us from the door of his forlorn bungalow, what would he say about it? Does he bring away from this country the same image as we do? I doubt it. The lean jackal burrowing in the sand has his point of view, the swallow who sees it from on high has his own—and that is the poet's view, they say. . . .

Sand, sand, always more sand, sand without relief, color, or end. Near the bank gleams a painfully white salt-marsh. All the tracks and hollows are effaced. It stretches out to infinity with nothing to mark the distance or suggest the human scale. A complete void . . . nothingness . . . Gradually one's scorched eyes get tired, the mind grows numb. Then, for distraction, the canal enlarges into a blue lake. The sea beats against the banks and the gulls whirl about, like scraps of torn paper thrown to the wind. Some tamarisks, a gum-tree with gray branches, a hovel seeking shade under a skeleton acacia. An Arabian chant rises from the antique barges which float about us, their masts drooping. And then sand again, as far as the eye can see, to the edge of the sky. . . .

This eternal solitude ends by becoming tiresome.

Bit by bit curiosity wanes; my eyes close; I doze off. There is a buzzing in my ears and the conversation from the bar comes to me in a faint rumble of meaningless words. Are they still talking in there? What fortitude . . .

I am overwhelmed by the heat. Thickened blood seems to run more slowly, to clot in my head. Thoughts stick in the mind like glue to the fingers. I feel sluggish and heavy, the least movement is an effort. I let myself go. I do not budge any more, nor even think.

"You had better sit on the port-side, you won't be so hot."

The voice made me jump, I opened my eyes. Had I been asleep? Perhaps . . . for about forty winks, as they say. It hardly takes any longer to doze off here. Wide-awake now, I smiled up at the director of the troupe whose familiar presence had come upon me so unexpectedly—dressed in a cream-colored alpaca jacket and Turkish slippers.

"Would you like to come to the rehearsal?" he asked. "Your friends are there already. We're putting on *La Bohême*. Come along, it will help kill some time."

From under the awning of the second-class deck

the sound of laughter and singing floated up. I decided immediately: "I'll come with you."

And I followed him down the narrow iron ladder. It was even hotter here under the awning where the sun fell perpendicularly than on our own deck protected by a thick ceiling. They had improvised a stage on the lid of the hatchway which was several feet higher than the floor of the poop, and the spectators who sat on folding chairs looked like clumps of huge white mushrooms in their pith helmets.

As we entered to the accompaniment of the piano, they were laughing loudly. A Musette clad in a short dress, an English lady's helmet with a long green veil, and yellow spectacles on her nose, was skylarking on the platform with a big lout of a Schaunard dressed all in white linen, except for the seat of his trousers which was quite black where the poor devil had sat down on a greasy stanchion; and the two of them made such a ridiculously comical pair that I immediately began to laugh with the others. The dissatisfied accompanist stopped at every line and you would see him emerge from his music box, with a Turkish towel tied around his neck, and beat out the measure furiously with a long ape's arm. Unfortunately, that did not prevent Musette, who danced very well, from continuing to sing off-key.

"Never mind, don't tire yourself," interrupted the director who was always contented. "It's going very nicely."

The entire troupe was there, together with my Shanghai friends and some second-class passengers. At first I had eyes only for Manon. She was dressed in a large cowboy sombrero and a polka-dotted silk handkerchief knotted over her white blouse, lending her an amusing burlesque air. Approached by a tall young man, who turned his back to me, she put her arm around his neck. That was her lover, undoubtedly. I was curious to meet him.

"See here, Monsieur Largy," called the director just then.

The other turned around, and stupefied, I recognized my young man of Marseilles with the scar on his chin. So he was Werther. What I had romantically imagined one evening hearing him sing, now turned out to be the truth. I had thought so often of that grave-faced stranger on the landing of the Quai des Belges, and I had fashioned for myself so avid a portrait of the mysterious tenor whom we occasionally heard singing so plaintively from the stern of the boat, that I stood dumfounded for a moment in front of this solid youth, so different from what I had expected. I can still see him as he appeared to me that afternoon, called away from his embrace,

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with his bronzed complexion, short breeches hitched above bare knees, an almost sleeveless sport shirt and his helmet tilted back rakishly—looking for all the world like one of those motion picture planters who smile at you from the screen with their white teeth gleaming.

As soon as I had been introduced, I could not help telling him of my surprise. It seemed to me that a shadow passed over his face as I recalled our meeting in Marseilles, but he immediately recovered his smile.

“Now, you see,” he told me in his warm, vibrant voice that bespoke the singer, “I have nothing of the love-lorn romantic about me, neither his fatal pallor nor his mournful expression. I’m almost ashamed to say it, but happiness always follows me.”

At these words, I had to suppress a frown. I am not superstitious but I do not like to see fate tempted in this fashion. His mistress who had overheard rushed over to him.

“Knock on wood!” she cried. She said this in the same horrified tone that she would have employed to cry: “Spit out!” if she had seen him swallow poison, and it was so sweet that the young man drew her laughingly towards him.

“Silly goose!” he reproached her tenderly. “She’s

afraid of everything, Monsieur, of the sea, mice, thunder, snakes,—”

At the mention of this malefic word, Manon cried: “Oh, no! don’t say that. It brings bad luck!”

And making the sign of a horn with her two fingers, she again averted the evil-eye, gravely repulsing the devil, without a smile—as solemnly as a believer crossing himself.

“With such a companion,” I said to him, “you have nothing to fear.”

She opened her eyes wide and looked at her lover with a naïve devotion: “Isn’t he handsome?” she asked. “What a hit he’s going to make! Are the women elegant in Indo-China? Are there many savages there too? Are ladies permitted in the theatre? How do they dress?”

She hurled a dozen questions pell-mell at me in this fashion, each one more absurd than the other, and without waiting for a reply, flitted on to other things, already forgetting what she had asked.

“My scatter-brained darling,” murmured the amused young man. And tapping her on the forehead: “Not much brains in there, but no badness either.”

“Look here, you’re saying that I’m stupid!”

“Are the birds stupid?”

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They went on whispering this foolishness, their faces close together, forgetting that people were looking at them. Manon seemed more fragile than ever now in the muscular arms of the young man; with her cheek pressed against him she had assumed a pose that you instinctively felt must be very familiar to her.

"In your arms, I'm not afraid of anything. Swear that you love me! . . ." She arched her brows and smiled, showing the tip of her tongue between her teeth. Her credulous heart was illuminated in her face at that moment.

"Come on, Mademoiselle Bernard, it's your turn!" cried the pianist.

"I'm coming."

She climbed nimbly on a chair, jumped on to the platform, and with no effort at all, as if continuing her conversation, she began to sing. Merely to look at her and hear her sing made you feel all aglow. Manon in this play became Mimi, but she changed only the rôle, not her appearance nor her voice.

"There's a consumptive who will have a hard time to make herself look pitiful," said the Pekin banker.

"That's true," admitted the director, rolling his beady eyes, "she hasn't got a physique that inspires pity exactly . . . And no more dramatic ability than a flower-pot. But what a voice! You might say that

she came into the world only to laugh and sing.”

“And to love,” added Prater with a leer.

Did the shot hit the broker? Like the rest of us, he was following the rehearsal apparently not particularly interested in the pretty singer. Far from evincing jealousy, he spoke very cordially to Werther, having understood immediately that he was the only member of the troupe with whom a conversation was possible. His associate had not been mistaken, this Jacques Largy was very well-bred and intelligent, and it was surprising to find him in such a second-rate company.

“As a matter of fact, I’m more surprised than anyone else,” he acknowledged with a forced smile when I told him of my astonishment.

From the director I had already learned part of his history, and Werther told me the rest. At the beginning of 1914, while still a young boy, he had lost both his parents, and been left entirely at liberty by an indifferent guardian. He entered the Paris Conservatory, not so much from musical inclination, as to gain an opportunity to meet the pretty girl students whom he used to pass in the morning at the Place de l’Europe while walking to his *lycée*. The professor of music, amazed at his voice and his talent, had made him work hard, promising him a first place in the Opéra, all that he held most glorious.

But the War broke out, and just inside the age limit, the youth had enlisted.

“Not precisely the sort of engagement that my professor had anticipated,” he told me with a smile.

After the War, what could he do? Twenty-four years old, with no profession and not much fortune left, accustomed to risk everything in one careless gesture, to wear himself out without producing anything. He was like thousands of other young men who had been robbed of their happiest years and the best of their strength and then thrown back, five years later, upon a society they no longer knew, which never thought of offering them guidance, and was in fact surprised that yesterday’s adored aviator did not dutifully turn back into an apprentice mechanic or that the chevroned young officer from the colonies could not be happy scribbling away in an office, waiting for his old-age pension.

For fifty-two months they had been forbidden to think, act, or desire. They could only obey. Whatever there was to do, someone had thought it out for them. They were told: “At such and such an hour, you eat,” and they ate. “Dig!” and they shouldered a pick-axe . . . “Advance!” and they charged . . . Even their manner of walking, of placing their feet on the ground, was regulated by someone else: “Left! Right!” They had only to listen. . . . And all at

once, when the command was issued, they had to turn back into men.

"It was hard. . . . We didn't know how," said the young man, thinking aloud, his clear eyes lost in the past.

Demobilized after having been wounded three times and having spent several months in the hospital, he had tried to acquire an independent position, first in scientific farming, then in the automobile field, but always badly advised by his guardian, he had failed in each case, only deepening the hole in his parental inheritance.

"But this guardian must have been an imbecile," I said. "What became of him?"

The young man frowned. "Dead," he answered dryly.

Then as he began hurriedly to talk to me about Florence Bernard, his voice softened. He had met her at a watering-place where she was playing, and from that day on his life was in a turmoil. How could he manage? Take Manon out of the theatre and live with her? He no longer had enough money. Follow her, hoping blindly for a miracle? That was what he had done, gaily sacrificing the last of his fortune. His mistress had implored him at that time to take up his singing again, so that they need never be separated, but he had refused.

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"Smear a lot of white grease on my face and sing cavatinas with my hand on my heart? No, thank you, not for me."

The young man had a different plan. As his mistress had just contracted for an engagement in Indo-China, he had decided to convert all his remaining assets into cash and sail with her as a simple passenger. Once in the colonies, with the help of the residue of his capital he could secure a concession or establish a new plantation. And he would keep Florence Bernard.

However, at the last moment, the money on which he was counting had failed him. Why? He did not tell me and I dared not question him. There had been some painful days for his mistress and himself; he had felt ready for any rash act. I saw his face grow pale at the remembrance of those hours. Finally, one evening after a last fruitless attempt, he had rejoined Manon. The tenor of the troupe had died suddenly, just a few days before sailing: perhaps it was a divine omen. And, making up his mind immediately, he had signed up and embarked.

"You see," he concluded, "I'm only a tenor by chance."

His story was plausible, for love explains everything. All the same, I was surprised that he had given in so quickly. "Couldn't you wait a bit? To try

and recover that money and join your friend later?"

But his face immediately assumed a set expression. "No, I couldn't," he said nervously. "I had to leave." Then he looked at me with a strange fixity, and uttered a forced laugh. "My last chance!" he exclaimed with simulated gaiety.

Someone called to him, and scorning the aid of the stool, he jumped upon the platform with a single flex of his muscular body.

"*Du lieber Gott!*" cried Prater ecstatically. "There's a handsome fellow for you!"

The young man was visibly embarrassed at having to rehearse before all these people. He stood smiling at me from the edge of the stage and said in a low voice: "What awful music!"

However, after the first few measures, he forgot his discomfort, and began to sing easily. All the chattering stopped, all eyes were glued on him. His voice was unmistakably beautiful, sonorous, and well-placed, but the most striking thing was the way he played with it, sometimes holding it like a sigh against his lips, then suddenly liberating it full force in a passionate cry. Perhaps it was because he always sang for his mistress—today Mimi, tomorrow Manon, Louise, or Lakmé, lover to each of them—that he put such fire into it, and lent such freshness to these hackneyed old arias. Thus, very softly, as

if restraining his tears, he would murmur: "*Mimi s'en est allée . . .*" and you seemed to be hearing that plaintive song for the first time.

"It's Werther!" whispered the passengers who had heard him the night before.

Curious loiterers wandered in and listened spell-bound. The tall lieutenant of the second-class deck seemed rooted to the spot, and a chambermaid who had stuck her head through a window looked as if her eyes were full of tears.

"There's a real artist!" exclaimed the director in audible admiration.

"Pity that he's not a professional," quickly added the company's basso, jealous because his own voice was always hoarse.

As a professional, in truth, he was sadly deficient. Sometimes he even forgot his rôle and mistaking his cue, would let the accompanist proceed alone, or else come in much too soon.

"That won't do! . . . Begin again!" bawled the pianist, waving his towel like a white flag. Jacques Largy obeyed without grumbling, as if he were doing all this for his own amusement. Three times, four times, he repeated a melody without his voice showing a trace of fatigue.

"We'll know the whole repertoire by heart by the

time we arrive," said Garrot who was already humming several passages.

As a change, perhaps, the broker was flirting now with that alluring brunette whom I had noticed at the bar last night. She was Mlle. Favier, one of the stars of the troupe, whom her comrades called Carmen because of her principal rôle. She seemed to solicit compliments and fluttered a bit too much.

"You have a very pretty comrade, my dear Mademoiselle," said Prater to her, indicating Florence Bernard.

"Oh, yes!" she answered like a good sport. "She's my best friend. We've made all our tours together. She's blonde, and I'm brunette, so we don't clash."

The awaited compliment did not arrive. Prater was gazing at Manon in absorbed admiration, puffing out his swarthy cheeks and pursing his purple-lined mouth.

"*Puppchen*," he said tenderly. "How nice they look together. They seem to adore each other."

The broker didn't bite; he pretended not to hear. Carmen burst into a laugh.

"That's true, they never stop kissing. It's disgusting. As for me, I'm travelling alone . . ." And she threw a provocative glance at the Pekin banker. But the latter was following the legs of the enraged Mus-

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ette, who, feeling herself noticed, had taken off her yellow spectacles and was talking of removing her helmet. In spite of continued reprimands, she could not get herself to sing correctly, nor could the basso recover his voice. A little more crimson each time, the orchestra leader would spring out from behind his piano like a marionette.

"You're off key!" he shouted.

The basso shrugged his shoulders: "It'll be good enough for the colonies."

At last the director arose. He, at least, was pleased with the performance. "That went very well, children," he assured them. "It's enough for today. You must have time to admire the desert; one doesn't pass it every day."

The desert? To tell the truth, everyone had forgotten it. But it had not changed. On either bank it stretched out interminably, the same plain of sand, with here and there a pitiful caravan of Bedouins and camels winding a path in the distance. The canal widened out in places and formed a sort of beach where the waves beat drowsily. A green spot of tamarisks seemed to concentrate all the coolness. Soon the canal narrowed back into a straight line and continued its monotonous course.

"Is this the desert?" asked Manon, approaching the edge of the ship.

"Quite so," answered Jacques.

But she was unconvinced. "Swear by you and me," she insisted.

"I swear it!"

A glass of soda in her hand, she stood gazing seriously ahead, her forehead pressed against the rail. She almost seemed to be reflecting. Then, having sucked at the straw imbedded in the cracked ice: "Well, as for me," she announced, "I find this desert very pretty."

I was impressed by her opinion. It was the poet's, indeed the bird's point of view.

WE regained our own deck just as the steamer emerged from the canal. The water which had been a limpid green suddenly changed to a blue that looked almost solid. In the east, there were still the same sand banks with the distant mountains illuminated by the sunset; in the west appeared several houses, lime-washed to an ochreous desert-yellow. Bit by bit, the two banks of the canal moved further apart. Soon we were surrounded by several sail-boats, tacking and veering on the sea now grown rough. We were entering the Gulf of Suez.

"Good afternoon!" cried the Fat Little Man who had come back from his picture hunt with a game-

bag full of negatives. "I shot three camels against the light, they'll be superb!"

He was full of good spirits. Looking at the terrace of the bar, as crowded as any boulevard café, he said in a tone of light raillery: "The camel should serve us all as an example, gentlemen! A model of sobriety. He crosses the desert without food or drink. And on foot too. . ."

The doctor who was present looked at him disdainfully. "Isn't he an idiot?" he exclaimed, calling me to witness. "The sobriety of the camel! . . . One must be pretty stupid to make such senseless remarks! And that's the stuff they teach children! Of course, those unfortunate animals get neither water nor food for the excellent reason that their Bedouins haven't any to give them; and then the fools go into ecstasy about the poor creatures' lack of appetite. . . . Don't you find the irony a bit strong? Give a camel a few bundles of oats, a bale of green grass and a trough of fresh water, and you'll soon see how sober he is. . . . On the contrary, there's no more gluttonous animal: I once saw one burst with overeating."

Then he glared severely at the Fat Little Man: "That's what's in store for him too. He's got all the symptoms—short wind, protruding veins on temples and neck, and lips that are turning the color of an egg-plant. All of which promises us a nice little at-

tack, cerebral hæmmorrhage, and a cemetery at the end . . . That will teach him to give others lessons in sobriety."

I did not dare ask him whether the "others" referred to the camels or ourselves.

Suez had just appeared, a thin stiletto strip of land thrust between sea and sky. Soon the port came into view. A group of modest houses surrounded a large residence which was too white and too consciously elegant. For contrast, enormous reservoirs of mazout, as ugly as gas-tanks. And in back, the desert once more, the immense changing desert reflecting the color of the sky.

Twilight caressed the world with its ephemeral beauty. The coral cliffs seemed to melt into space and the lilac mountain-top of Arabia mingled with the clouds. Inconstant sky, deceitful sky. . . . The east which seemed glowing with dawn but a few hours before, had faded suddenly into a pale blue mist.

"*Stratus!*" exclaimed the inexorable doctor, pointing out an unperceived dark ribbon of clouds.

Was he going to conjure up rain-clouds now? Did he wish to disgust us even with the sky?

I imagined that a light breeze was blowing from the sea though it was only the swift movement of the boat; but even this semblance of coolness was refreshing after the suffocating day.

We lingered on deck before going down to dress for dinner. The children's meal had just been announced, and all at once the deck was noisy with the nightly commotion of cries, laughter, and pursuits. Then, one by one, the mothers or the nurses led the youngsters away. There was always the same small group of us left loitering, minus the Pekin banker who took a long time to dress.

"She'll have a good time in Shanghai," said Garrot, continuing his conversation.

"Of course," replied his associate who was limping along beside us like a duck. "You can even engage the two of them: Manon as stenographer and Jacques as clerk."

This banter did not please the broker. "Not you as cashier, at any rate," he retorted.

Decidedly, the Chinaman was right: they were too fond of each other.

IN THE RED SEA

“GOD, what heat!”

No other phrase is heard the whole length of the ship. Free passage of air is impeded by the brown canvas blinds which have been lowered all along the sunny side of the deck, and you have the sensation of breathing in a vacuum. Peer out between the interstices and the light blisters your eyes. Even without stirring, your body drips perspiration, the linen is plastered to the skin. The least motion is an effort, as if the heavy air had to be lifted with every movement. And there is no way of resisting the heat or defending yourself. If you drink a soda for refreshment, it evaporates in perspiration; if you take a shower, the water seems to smoke.

What can be done? Nothing . . . Wait . . . Get used to it . . . Nature herself submits, as prostrate as the rest of us. The air is inert, the sun casts dazzling little reflections which dance on an ocean as sleek as a pond.

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Those passengers who are making their first trip dare not look out on the sea or venture on deck without a hat for fear of sun-stroke, much to the amusement of the colonials. Odette Nicolai, to show her contempt, scorns smoked glasses and marches jauntily up and down quite bare-headed. The Solitary Lady, on the other hand, refuses to leave her steamer-chair. A book in one hand and a paper-cutter in the other, she sits there for hours without budging. If she stirred ever so slightly, her cheeks would grow purple and the perspiration streak her powder; so, to remain beautiful, she ceases to live. How does she manage not to fall asleep?

No new distractions . . . Some flying fish emerge and skim the waves; they seem to scratch the water. A little further on, some seahogs are disporting themselves. Occasionally one can even see the flash of a shark's white belly. Nothing else.

"It'll be the same for four days," the doctor promises us amiably. "And the last will be the worst."

He is right. The temperature rises steadily as the ship ploughs southward. As you follow, on the chart, the parallels of latitude cutting the sea with their thin lines, you think of a ladder which must be descended to the very bottom, to the equator's smoking furnace.

"*Ach*," exclaimed Prater in a distressed voice,

“that poor troupe travelling second-class and even third, don’t you think they are more to be pitied than we? And poor, pretty Manon, especially, we ought to do something for her.”

The broker glanced sideways at him, suspicious of this unaccustomed kindness. “Don’t torment yourself, heart of gold. I’ve thought of it for you.”

In fact, without saying a word to any of us, Garrot had gone to the purser and offered, with the consent of the director of the troupe, to organize at his own expense the regular fancy-ball for the benefit of the sailor’s fund—the entire series of evening fêtes, tombolas, and other entertainments which take place every trip between Djibouti and Colomba. The purser had been delighted to accept his cooperation. Then the broker had subtly suggested that the artistes be called in immediately to distract the passengers by giving concerts and providing music at dinner and the purser, seizing eagerly on the project, had instantly launched explicit orders that the company be allowed on the first-class deck and that the stars even be permitted to eat at our table on certain days.

The first concert was a success. Despite the heat all the passengers turned out. Some of them crowded into the saloon, preferring to suffocate and see well, the others grouped on the deck before the open win-

dows. Truth to tell, the program was banal, the execution only passable, and to account for its kind reception, you had to bear in mind the uniqueness of hearing *Peer Gynt* in the Red Sea.

"Don't blame the musicians, they are doing the best they can," said the doctor mockingly, although he himself was unable to distinguish a Bach fugue from ragtime.

Musette drew some smiles, Mlle. Favier some bravos, and a little baritone pleased the ladies; but Florence Bernard scored the triumph of the evening. It was a genuine pleasure to hear her light voice play around with the low notes and then soar suddenly into frenzied bird-trills. After the sixth number there were still cries of "encore!"

One passenger, however, remained indifferent—Odette Nicolai. She did not want you to think that a spectacle which could amuse everybody could also please her, and so as soon as the music started, she began to pace up and down, her heels clicking sharply on the deck. The annoyed auditors turned around and hissed: "Sh—h!" but she did not stop. Only the final applause could drown the tiresome noise.

After Florence Bernard, came Jacques Largy. Without straining for effect, he began to sing Schumann. The melomaniacs in the audience at first re-

gretted the choice of these familiar melodies, but gradually the plaintive harmony penetrated:

*“Quand je regarde dans tes yeux
Je crois en songe voir les cieux. . . .”*

On his lips it became a fresh passionate lyric. Everyone stopped talking. I turned my head and saw Odette Nicolai straining on her tip-toes, trying to see. She stood rooted to the spot, with the charming attentive expression and wide eyes of a child who is secretly following a forbidden spectacle. But surprising my glance, she immediately reassumed her haughty air and walked off.

The concert over, I found her seated in her usual place. She was dreaming, her eyes gazing into the distance, and distractedly biting her lips with her sharp little teeth. The director, drunk with success, was enjoying his triumph unabashed. He took particular pride in Jacques Largy.

“Didn’t I tell you so? That boy is seduction itself. It’s impossible not to fall for him.”

I looked closely at Odette who was listening to us with an impertinent expression, her nose in the air. She smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

THE handful of artistes revolutionized life on board. They were the target for all glances and an eternal

subject for conversation. The Ugly Lady, always the first at the concerts, was not, however, the last to criticize the singers.

"I can't understand how those women manage," she said crossly. "They're supposed to have no money and yet they change their dresses four times a day."

"Oh! that doesn't put them to any great expense . . ." the Bird-in-the-cage put in stiffly, furious at having been supplanted in the men's attention.

The latter, in truth, did not disguise the pleasure they took in the singers' company. Evening now found them dancing instead of smoking on deck or locking themselves up in the bar; and in the afternoon, as soon as the artistes appeared, they were eager to offer their services.

"There's one thing which has become impossible," the radiant director remarked to me, "and that's to discover Mlle. Favier by herself."

Carmen, in fact, was always escorted by at least one man, and if you did not find her leaning on the rail flirting with an officer of the Chinese Squadron, it was because she was installed in the smoking-room, where you heard her laughing heartily. She was not the prettiest member of the troupe, but her face shone with a love of love that no man could mistake, and each one must have imagined that those lips offered

their freshness and those large black eyes sparkled for him alone. Even the good purser had been taken in and was whispering gallant compliments to her like any other fool. The doctor was disgusted.

"No doubt," he grumbled, "even the most bashful man discovers some kind of eloquence when it's a question of seducing a woman.

Manon conducted herself with more decorum than her friend. She spoke to no one except the Shanghaians whom she had known before. In their company she was at ease, she regained the world in which she liked to live, an atmosphere of luxury, of light conversation, with pleasure as the chief topic.

"They're nice in second-class," she said with a little *moue*, "but it's too 'family-like'."

In her mouth it was not so much a criticism as an admission of boredom. Here, on the contrary, she was always amused. The broker had a special talent for distracting her. He would talk about the different countries to which she was going, describing their cities and customs in an animated Parisian jargon, emphasizing details with sly winks. Very adroitly, in passing, he would allude to his great wealth: for example, he would treat the crowd to champagne because a horse from one of his stables had won at Auteuil, or he would ask the Pekin banker's advice

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about some repairs which he wanted to have effected in his Shanghai mansion. On the subject of Shanghai he was inexhaustible.

"The queen of all countries, the capital of luxury!" he declaimed, as if he were a barker at the entrance to a country-fair booth. "If you only knew it!"

But when he exaggerated too much, Prater would address a sort of neighing chuckle in the direction of Manon and mutter: "Beyond the seas veal always costs half a kopeck. But you have to pay a hundred roubles to get there."

Surrounded by all these men of money, Jacques Largy felt embarrassed; his gaze would grow remote and his jaw relax until he resembled the stranger I had seen that first time at the Vieux Port. Then Manon would lean over and say mockingly:

"Where are you, darling? In the moon?"

He would look at her with affection and his smile would return instantly. "I don't care where—so long as you're with me."

Hearing these men talk of their business, of their projected millions, of fortunes won and lost, his faith began to weaken. It was not that he was of the type which loses courage easily and still less that this successful company had any real value in his eyes. But when he scrutinized the puny, weasel-faced broker, the negroid Prater with his heavy paunch, and

even the banker who was more preoccupied with worldly vanities than with his work, he came to the conclusion that they must have attained success by a much different route than the one he was setting out on. And yet at the bottom of his heart he felt so infinitely superior to them.

Humiliated at the thought that they might think of him in the light of a poor neighbor, he signed the bar-checks more often than was necessary. This extravagance embarrassed Garrot and stupefied his associate. It merely intrigued me.

"Then he still has some money left?" I asked Mlle. Favier one evening.

"Not a sou," she informed me. "He has already given a lot for Manon's dresses and her stage costumes. Now he's spending the advance on his salary."

"But he must have inherited something on the death of his guardian?"

"I don't know. Besides, I think he died only just before we sailed."

Jacques Largy ordinarily listened moodily to the Shanghaians without saying a word. On certain days, however, he found it hard to contain himself and rushed into their conversation like a young bull. But in vain did he talk about his glorious plans and vaunt his self-confidence; no one was convinced.

"One doesn't colonize with a rifle any more," the

banker said to him. "Those heroic days are over. The modern weapon is money."

Each time he permitted his enthusiasm to burst forth, they would catch him up in the same manner. Could they undermine his illusions? Perhaps they were just trying to counsel him, to do him a good turn? Florence Bernard thought so, at any rate.

"You see," she said to Jacques, "these gentlemen tell you the same thing that I do. You'll never accomplish anything over there. It would be so much wiser to go back to France."

Without meaning any harm, she discouraged him like the others. The wealth of these passengers and their ostentatious luxury made her open her eyes with envy, and she did not realize that she was doing anything wrong in constantly repeating to her lover: "What a pity we haven't any money." She was incapable of hiding any sentiment, good or bad; she had to express it as soon as experienced—as if she had no mind in which to keep it.

The idea of installing a creature like Florence Bernard in the wild Cambodian jungle or in some little station on the border of Annam seemed senseless to everyone. Garrot especially was scandalized, but he knew enough not to say so. Instead, he managed to direct the conversation to the subject of colonization, and with a feigned impersonality depict

his notion of the kind of life led in the delta of Cochin-China or the plantations of the red-earth region: sunstrokes, fevers, a temperature as enervating as a steam-room. . . .

"I can assure you that one year in that climate counts as two," he said. "The women wither and fade away with the heat."

Manon's face fell; a little more and she would have burst into tears. Fortunately, Prater was there. He had seen through the broker's game and was not going to let him hold the upper hand much longer. His face elongated, puckered and twisted—all these contortions to indicate his disapproval—then, as if his conscience were prompting him, he finally intervened:

"You exaggerate, my dear man," he articulated slowly, as if translating. "Life in the colonies is not so frightful. Prater knows too . . . The people there are happier than in France."

Jacques Largy grasped eagerly at this life-line: "That's true, isn't it, Monsieur?"

"Certainly . . . It's right for young men like you to settle there. It's good for their country, and good for them too."

Jacques now found this stranger with eyes like a boiled fish quite amiable. Garrot, less easily duped, wondered what his associate was driving at.

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"Why don't you go out there yourself?" he asked dryly.

"*Ja . . . Warum nicht?* Perhaps Prater will go there some day . . . To live in the heart of nature—"

The broker cut in with a roar of laughter. "Yes, indeed, let's talk about the open life in the colonies! . . . A fine house, but not a soul around it . . . Plenty of champagne, but a swollen liver . . . An auto—and a brushwood boulevard . . . Six boys to serve you, but they accomplish less than one French housemaid . . . Lots of piastres, but 104 degrees fever. . . ."

One answered the other and the bickering never stopped. Manon listened to them in despair, turning imploring eyes to her lover. At length Jacques, exasperated, protested:

"If it's hard and dangerous, so much the better! I've had enough of wasting time. Is it courage one needs? Well, I have it!"

Garrot, knowing the weak point in that argument, glanced towards Manon out of the tail of his eye. "And Mlle. Bernard . . . She's courageous too? . . ."

She herself answered spontaneously: "Oh, no! Not a bit!"

At this candid avowal the whole table burst into

laughter, even Jacques. He drew his mistress against his shoulder and said softly, as if reasoning with a child:

“That’s all right . . . I have enough for both.”

That was all that was necessary to make her smile. Once more she became cajoling: “I don’t know just what you want, but I’m sure it’s all right.”

This time the broker felt himself defeated and for the rest of the evening we spoke of other things. But the discussion inevitably re-opened at the very next encounter. It had really grown into a deadly duel between Garrot and his associate, for only Manon, Jacques, and the good-natured director were credulous enough to believe that the two men were quarrelling simply on account of a divergence of opinion. The broker worked slowly, adroitly manoeuvring to discourage the young man and estrange his mistress from him; the less subtle Prater played his cards openly, extravagantly vaunting colonial life to the refractory Manon and going so far as to promise to help Jacques Largy secure a position on the plantations and perhaps even to procure capital for him.

All this annoyed the young man. Had he not been afraid of displeasing Florence he would have said: “Let’s not go up there any more.” It was their only distraction, however, and so they kept coming back.

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But now whenever the conversation took a turn which did not suit him, Jacques would grasp his mistress by the arm and say: "Come on, let's play some music." Or else he would organize a party of deck-quoits and all the passengers would come running to watch the artistes play.

"That boy is very adroit . . . dexterous," said Prater, pronouncing the last word in his halting guttural English. "I bet he wins again. Ten dollars, Garrot?"

WHEN one gets used to the heat, life becomes agreeable once more. The sun pours in through the open port-holes and awakens the passengers early. The lazier ones turn their faces to the wall and try to go back to sleep, but hardly have they shut their eyes than the deck-boys come trooping out and begin climbing up on the rail, whistling loudly as they roll down the canvas blinds. Soon they go away. Quiet at last? No. Bells begin to ring, stewards dash through the corridors stopping to exchange orders, on deck the children begin to play and chase one another on their rattling scooters . . . Yes, it would be much better to get up.

Already one can hear the click of the ladies' mules as they patter about in their cabins, and also the

ceaseless drip of the shower-bath—that slightly russet ocean water which lathers with such difficulty. When you get dressed, the linen suit feels so light and fresh that you have a sensation of nakedness. Once on deck you distribute your good-mornings, settle your chair in an advantageous spot, and the day commences. These days are all alike, happy in a quiet, monotonous way. Nothing to do, nothing to see. Coastlines and islands? No . . . Only the green transparent sea and the sky. The hours seem interminable and the bored passengers lie stretched out all day. Nevertheless, when we arrive at the last port, each one will sigh: “Already!” Moments of happiness can only be judged in retrospect by the regrets they leave with you. . . .

Meals, teas, concerts and evening dances mark off each day. At noon, when the reckoning is posted, there is also the advent of the daily betting pool. How many miles has the ship made since yesterday? A siren, instead of a gong, summons the players, and a large crowd lines up in advance before the lattice-window.

“Three hundred and twelve!” cries Garrot, as if he were urging on his horse.

“Three hundred and seventeen!” parries his associate.

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Prater pockets the money regularly and the broker finally declares that he must bribe the officials to fix the numbers.

They gamble all the rest of the day: it is another method of fighting. Bridge and the running pool are not sufficient, they bet even while they eat. Without cards, dice, or anything—they use bottles of champagne as poker stakes.

The game is simple: each one draws out a bank note at random and looks at the numerals. With these numbers they make up a hand: pairs, three-of-a-kind, straight, or full-house.

“It’s pretty costly for Garrot,” says his associate as he refills his glass.

The Pekin banker has invented a more delicate distraction with which to pass the time. Seated in a retreat facing the sun, he watches the ladies file by and admires their legs through the transparent skirts. He calls them his Chinese shadows. The short skirts do not hide very much; with his discovery they no longer hide anything.

I do not know whether the Solitary Lady has seen through his game, but she seems to lend herself willingly to this gallant scrutiny. Posed against the railing, her silhouette outlined on the canvas as if with a brush, she turns her head and smiles at the indiscreet banker. And she so severe! Is it true, as

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Kipling would have it, that there is no morality east of Suez?

After lunch comes the siesta, one hour of sleep lying half-naked on the couch under the whirling electric-fan. Then, some more rest, or a promenade on deck.

The weather is still scorching. The men on star-board-watch who had been enjoying the shade are now baking in the sun and the passengers installed on the port-side look patronizingly at the unfortunate ones on the other. The heat is enervating. Some of the ladies read and others embroider, while the men take up their bridge. Even at the bar, under the ten electric fans and despite the breeze blowing in from the port-holes, it is difficult to breathe.

The most indefatigable passenger is the old American in the green vizor. He has been sitting at his table near a window in the saloon from three o'clock in the morning until lunch-time, typewriting incessantly. It appears that he is writing travel notes of his journey which he despatches to his magazine at every port. I wonder when he finds time to make any observations.

Soon the steward passes by, striking his tea gong, which is the signal for the artistes to rejoin us and provide a fresh consignment of gossip. Mlle. Favier, hasty-tempered as a real Carmen, has been quarrel-

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ing again with the wife of a government official; the handsome young first-violin has been smitten by a Dutch girl; and Musette has been fooling with one of our Englishmen—not the tall thin one with the frank eyes—the other one, the villain with the toothbrush moustache and the zouave knickers. She likes him better. As for Manon, she sits and broods, complains of the heat under the second-class awning and of being constantly inconvenienced in the four-berth cabin which she shares with her comrades. The very sight of the Creole who is travelling in a luxurious stateroom makes her jealous.

“Why her and not me?” she frets.

Nothing can cheer her up, neither Garrot’s humorous sallies nor the gallantries of the banker. Her eyes downcast, she mumbles: “I’m not happy! I wish I were in Paris!”

Then Jacques will look at her anxiously, without saying a word. The tall young man with the smiling face is incredibly nervous. For no apparent reason, he gets frightened, his gaiety subsides. After an explosion of boyish hilarity, he will suddenly sober down as if he had been struck by a torturing thought. How many times have I found him leaning against the rail, so absorbed that he jumped when I put my hand on his arm. Is it the future that frightens him? The fear of losing Manon?

When Manon raises her head and sees her lover's worried face she instantly forgets her own trouble and presses close to him, clasping his hand.

"Forgive me, I was only joking"

They gaze into each other's eyes, reconciled, and, still holding hands, start off towards the saloon where the piano awaits them.

After these stifling days, evening comes as a deliverance. Limp bodies straighten up, voices become animated once more, everyone seems to be trying to recapture what he has missed in life since morning. We awaken at an hour when the rest of the world goes to sleep. In the twinkling of an eye, everything is transformed. The sea is the first to reflect darkness—the bright waves turn lead-colored; then the vault of the sky grows ashen, and in the west, the horizon seems to cut like a gray knife into the rosy throat of the sunset. In the distance a small felucca carries off in its sail all that remains of the light. It is over, night is falling . . . Or rather, it is rising. It emerges from the sea like a mist and as it ascends it forms a heavy blue veil which unites the waves with the sky.

People are beginning to promenade on deck again. Down below, the showers re-commence their play, and the chambermaids scurry from one cabin to another.

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"The laundress didn't come, Mademoiselle."

"Will you stitch this up for me quickly? . . . My strap's broken. . . ."

Then comes dinner in the large dining-room which looks even more elegant now that the men have donned white tuxedos. After dinner, the elevator brings the groups up again and the illuminated deck becomes as crowded as a casino-garden.

They dance everywhere—in the saloon, the reading room, and even on deck. On the rear poop the second-class piano is pounding out polkas, and on the front of the third-class deck couples are waltzing on the hatchway lid of the hold, some of the women in the arms of sailors. The steamer herself sways rhythmically to the lilting melody of the dance.

Lounging in the terrace of the bar, the smokers eye the women who walk by, some of them looking almost nude in their tight spangled dresses. Gradually the music draws the spectators towards the open window to watch the dancers. Manon is always the most popular and arouses the greatest jealousy among the women. The married men who invited her to dance the first night dare not approach her again for fear of a lecture when they get back to their cabins, and the Bird-in-the-cage has, it seems, forbidden the officers of the squadron to dance with Manon. What can she have promised them in return?

Odette Nicolai, for the sole pleasure of exasperating these women whom she hates, pretends to admire Florence Bernard, and after a rather complicated dance, accosts her in the middle of the floor to congratulate her with a peculiar inflection of insolent kindness.

"Won't you do that tango again, Mademoiselle? It would give us so much pleasure."

Manon in her simplicity takes the compliment at its face value and begins to like the young girl, even to find her pretty. Jacques, on the other hand, doesn't even notice her. He is bored with these dances and his taciturn face contrasts darkly with the smiling visage of Manon. He dances rarely, only upon compulsion, and when the jazz becomes too noisy, takes refuge at the other end of the deck. But even there the music pursues him. The American or negro airs have become an obsession on board and even the elevator boy in his cage hums them.

The Fat Little Man is the life of these jazz parties. The poor awkward fellow with the peevish wife seems somehow to have preserved a touch of romance. He has suddenly discovered a vocation no one would ever have suspected in him. One evening his wife permitted him to play the tambourine for a moment in memory of his military service; he made a big hit, and since that time he has never quitted his

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battery. At the first notes of the saxophone a frenzy seizes him, the sweat runs down his face and waving his short arms wildly, he strikes the cymbals, shakes the tambourine, jingles the bells, and growing miraculously inventive tries out a new instrument every night—the meat-saw brought up from the kitchens, or a wooden trumpet stolen from the children's room. You can hear him from the farthest end of the boat; he is no longer a man, but joy incarnate. Those passengers who, not deeming him of their class, have never spoken to him, now become his friends and Musette, noticing him for the first time, keeps repeating: "I think he's awfully amusing," with such insistence that it must make her Englishmen jealous.

No one can resist this furious music. The old American, who after his last round at the bar would insist every night that the sea was rough, joins in the fox-trot this evening, his face crimson as he dances; Odette's step-father sweeps away with Carmen under the unquiet glance of his wife; the Solitary Lady whirls by more rapidly in the tight embrace of the Pekin banker. The Ugly Lady resolutely gathers together in her corner all the men who do not dance, and the Fat Little Man beats, thumps, blows, never stops. . . .

To the young Nicolai, as to Jacques, all this is distasteful. The laughing, noisy crowd sets her nerves

on edge and a mere nothing exasperates her. When her step-father begins to dance with these outworn flourishes of an old-fashioned dandy, she seems to feel the mocking glances of all the passengers fixed on her and reddens with shame. Her mother's jealousy also makes her suffer, just as she suffers from her gaudy clothes and display of jewels. The girl's pride has not a single invulnerable spot.

She preserves a stiff front however, for she must hide her hurt, preserve her pose at any cost. It is at these moments that she becomes most obnoxious. She wants to show that nothing can touch her, that she doesn't care a rap what you may think of her or her family, and to show her contempt, she is ready for any impudence. It affords her a wicked delight to scandalize these people whose disdain she dreads. Everything she does is a challenge: her manner of dancing, the crazy remarks she makes out loud without even realizing their exact meaning, her enervated laugh, her way of staring. . . .

At the end, unable to bear it any longer, feeling that at any moment she will do something outrageous, she leaves the saloon. Usually the two lieutenants follow her and you hear them marching in step around the deck. But sometimes even the presence of her two cavaliers is unbearable and she mounts alone to the spardeck, just as she is, without a wrap,

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half-naked under her dance frock. Buried in a corner of the bulwark netting near the covered lifeboats, she offers herself to the sharp wind like a small living prow.

In the saloon, the Ugly Lady must already have noticed her absence. "She's climbed up there again with her little lieutenant . . . Like father, like daughter."

Odette is not ignorant of those remarks. With her teeth clenched and nostrils quivering, she forces herself to think of other things, compressing her heart between her two hands.

AT eleven o'clock the lights are extinguished. The last laughs are heard in the elevator, the bar empties. The steamer is going to sleep. Soon there will be nobody awake but the signalman on the foot-bridge, the officer in the chart-room, the helmsman standing beside his luminous compass, and at the bottom of the hold, the black stokers whom we never see.

After a few moments, however, all the passengers begin to reappear on the deserted deck. They have changed their costumes: the men wear pajamas, the women dressing-gowns. The former drag mattresses and the women are loaded with blankets. A group of young ladies arrive laughing, a little embarrassed, and the deck-steward hurries over with steamer-chairs

and opens the folding beds, instantly transforming the deck into a dormitory.

There were only a handful of us the first evening we entered the Red Sea, but now we are being imitated by everybody including the Pekin banker decked out in an astonishing pair of embroidered Chinese pajamas, and even old Prater who comes staggering along under a load of blankets, looking as if he were on his way to peddle them.

It is more comfortable here. Despite the wide-open port-holes and the electric fan you suffocate in the cabins; here you have the entire night for your chamber with the ends of the world for walls. You sleep in the infinite . . . The floor of the boat sways imperceptibly; the rolling motion rocks you gently to the rumble of the machinery, and as the ship cuts through the water the swift motion wafts a light breeze over your forehead and lulls you to sleep.

Odette Nicolai who occupies a stuffy inside cabin next to her parents also comes up to sleep on deck, although she has been forbidden to do so, and the two lieutenants post themselves there every night in the hope of speaking to her. Once the tall blond one, more than usually audacious, accosted her and offered to carry her blankets, but she dismissed him with such a curt "thanks" that he never dared risk it again. In the saloon she will take any liberty, glad

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of an opportunity to scandalize, but here, where the exchange of three words might suggest a liaison, she is reserve itself.

Draped in a bathrobe which reveals the cuffs of her pajamas, there is really nothing feminine about her. With that severe profile and short plastered hair, one might take her for an adolescent of equivocal grace.

The young men, not daring to turn their heads too much, watch her lie down, arrange her pillow, and pull up the blanket. To escape the glare of the watch light she turns her face towards the center of the ship and becomes just one more silhouette among others. Then they tip-toe stealthily away.

Now comes the exquisite hour . . . Not a sound. The noise of voices and laughter is as completely extinguished as if the deck-steward had snuffed it out when he departed. The sombre ocean seems to sing, the wide night is cooling as an immense fan and lulls you into such a beatific state that, half-dreaming already, you fight off the fatigue to be able to savor a bit longer the delicious joy of slipping into oblivion. You doze, dream a little, then look about once more. It is a little game that you play with yourself, on the borderland of slumber. When your eyelids finally close, they imprison a thousand stars. It is thus that Odette falls asleep.

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One night I passed near her. She was lying with one hand under her cheek, her lips childishly half-open, breathing regularly, her face at peace. She was so different from the little artificial creature we knew that I was slow in recognizing her. Gone the imposed frown and the haughty expression: the mask had fallen. And that evening I understood for the first time why her mother still calls her "My little girl." It is because she sometimes watches her as she sleeps.

BLONDE OR BRUNETTE

“A *la mé! A la mé!*”

The steamer had not yet weighed anchor when we were surrounded by a swarm of canoes laden with quite naked little negroes gesticulating and shouting that strange cry of “*A la mé!*” which was their French for “*A la mer.*” It is the greeting of the little divers of Djibouti.

There were dozens of them bawling in the water, their shaved heads raised towards us; and as other canoes approached, you saw more black fellows leaping about in them like fish in a basket and shouting as they plunged into the water. In a twinkling all the passengers were leaning over the sides of the ship to toss them coins.

It was marvellous, they didn't lose a single one. They formed a picturesque jumble on the waves, a battle of small outstretched arms catching the money as it fell. When a coin dropped into the water their eyes never lost sight of it. You saw them double up

on themselves and dive towards the bottom, stretching out their four paws like frogs. Suddenly, there was nothing to be seen but the almost white soles of their feet, planted there like so many strange water-lilies; then everything disappeared . . . They fought under the water like a school of famished fish. The more agile ones would seize the piece of money with one snap of the jaws, as a carp entraps a fly, and rising to the surface with a single movement of their legs, they would all take up the strange serenade.

They hardly seemed to swim—they floated, glided, and wriggled about, so light that the water bore them easily. Some of the taller ones had hoisted themselves up to the promenade deck, scaling the perpendicular sides of the ship goodness knows how, and there they amused themselves by diving one after another from this five-story height.

"A la mé! A la mé!" chanted the chorus of little negroes down below, their cheeks bulging with coins. This has become a sort of national cry for all the rabble of the regions, for even if you penetrate into the interior of Ethiopia, towards Addis-Abeba, and happen to stop at a little village after a thirty-hour railroad journey, your train will be assailed by a band of black-amoores who have never seen the sea but who nevertheless bawl: *"A la mé!"* as they frisk

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around the platform, convinced that this must mean something like: "Throw us some sous!"

Jacques Largy had been laughing more heartily than any of us, throwing coin after coin, under Prater's reproving eyes. He had not yet landed but he was already in love with Djibouti. As for Manon, dressed all in white with a pretty felt hat trimmed with green straw, she was going into paroxysms of joy and trembling with fear at the same time.

"Oh! the poor little children! . . . I'm so afraid that the sharks will eat them! . . . Warn them to be careful. . . ."

We had all gathered near the front of the boat where the accommodation-ladder was suspended. The broker had conceived the gracious idea of inviting the artistes to join us and they formed so incongruous a band that the other passengers had a hard time to refrain from laughing. With the too heavily made-up women, the director in a cream-colored jacket, the men singers dressed like Tartarins and Musette in a skirt above her knees, we could not hope to pass unremarked; but the one whose presence contrived to spoil everything, was the hoarse basso who, under the pretext that we were in the tropics and that he knew the customs, had composed a frightful costume comparable only to the one he wore in *Lakmé*—with a turban as the most innocuous

portion and a green parasol to complete it. At the thought of appearing in the company of these clowns, Manon felt she would die of mortification, and so she clung to the rail, continuing to throw down her coins, and holding Jacques by the arm. Fortunately, Garrot had a friend, a bank director, who had come to meet him in a private motorboat, and Florence Bernard and her lover were invited to join his party. The others crowded into the native barks, manned by naked black rowers with startling white eyes who fought over their clientèle with cannibal yells.

As soon as he touched land, Jacques Largy went into an ecstasy of joy and Florence clapped her hands: the show was beginning. The mere sight of the native carriages made them exclaim. Certainly one can still find, even in Europe, comical vehicles, some baroque stage-coaches and other extravagant conveyances, but there are none to compare in absurdity, antiquity, and general dilapidation with the *gharris* of Djibouti. They are ridiculous old contraptions any one of which would make the fortune of a circus. Dislocated carioles held together by nails and bits of cord, antique victorias adorned with oil-cans for lanterns, rag-pickers' carts propped up with boards and mounted on a filthy platform—all dragged along with a noise like scraping iron by mangy, indifferent nags. The negro coachmen stood

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erect on the front seats, bellowing as if conducting their fares to the stake.

"I want to ride in that!" cried Manon eagerly.

In vain did the tired broker try to entice her into the comfortable automobile waiting for them; she would not listen and climbed into the most dilapidated of the carriages, pulling her lover along with her. A horde of naked negro children to whom she was throwing sous, began to run after their vehicle, and in this fashion they made their entry into Djibouti. The rest of us marched in with the troupe of artistes, flanked always by the character out of *Lakmé*. Those passengers who had not been warned stared into his face curiously, mistaking him for a dervish.

Alone with his mistress, whom he had not held freely in his arms for more than a week, Jacques Largy was drunk with joy and laughed at everything. One glance—and Djibouti enchanted him. It was not beautiful, but it was breath-taking. Everything was new and dazzlingly white.

Big blocks of masonry pierced with Moorish windows, terraces from which the sun rebounded, a central square laid out with a T square, everywhere sharp angles, solid masses of shade—it looked like the work of a cubist. Beautifully clean and bare. A large empty space, rectilinear and deserted, with

the tops of palm trees peeping from behind the walls. White houses, white burnouses, white helmets, white smiles, scintillating white sand—and, for contrast, black swarms of running urchins, with close-shaved heads and hard round bellies from which the navel emerged like a snail. It was the siesta hour and all the façades had their Venetian blinds drawn, even the bank, the post-office, and business-houses. Not a customer in the shops; the arcades were deserted. The Menelik square was drenched in blinding light, with only a few Somalis contributing their shade.

“Look, let’s live here, just the two of us,” said Jacques, caressing Manon whose flesh seemed almost naked under her thin dress.

She looked at him in astonishment. “Would you really like that?”

“Oh yes! To have you here all to myself and make over my life so that no one will recognize us. . . .”

“Why make it over?”

He stopped short. Had he not been wearing smoked glasses she would have noticed the misery in his eyes. “Because,” he began, less assuredly, “because we can’t go on living this wretched theatrical life. I want to make you happy. You’ll see how well I’ll succeed.”

“Silly fool!”

But for the first time she was not frightened at the idea of living away from France. This country amused her. With curiosity her eyes followed the black horde that galloped behind the carriage, the laughing negresses, the Dankalis with long woolly hair, leaning on their tall staffs like ancient shepherds. Manon overwhelmed her lover with her “What is that?” and “Why?” As their vehicle turned the corner of a mosque she cried rapturously:

“Oh, look at the negro village! . . .”

With its minaret, straw-huts, and camels, she recognized all this as the same thing she had seen so often in the *Jardin d'Acclimation* and at the expositions. It was almost too perfect. Nothing was missing: neither the Moorish cafés where old men squatted and smoked their water-pipes, nor the little donkeys rolling in the dust, nor the flabby-breasted women carrying *grigris* around their necks, nor the little negroes prancing about stark naked—all wrapped in a drunken blaze of light which lent a picturesque quality to their poverty and a nobility to the rags and tatters. Transported with joy, impatient to see everything, Florence had already descended from the carriage and was rummaging in her purse for more coins. Jacques stood smiling at her, his own happiness redoubled.

"I'll take you to see the lumber exchange!" he promised her as a special treat.

On board he had heard so much about this lumber exchange that he had formed a mental picture of it: monumental piles of cedar trunks and guaiacum, the gleaming surfaces of mahogany and ebony logs, negroes in striped loin cloths beating the tom-tom, Abyssinian merchants modelled after the portrait of Emperor Menelik, and sheep pierced with a lance roasting over an open-air spit.

They arrived at the place where the lumber exchange should be. One of the negro children showed it to him: "Here, *moussié*, lumber market," he said, pointing to an encampment of nomads who had set up their miserable hovels in the calcimined square.

The young man gasped with surprise. Not a tree trunk, not even a pile of wood . . . And the roast kids, and the precious uncut stones, and the fragrant sandal-wood? He did not know how to save his face before his mistress. But Florence, who had anticipated nothing in advance, marvelled graciously enough, saying that she had never seen anything so funny before. Jacques, watching her laugh, forgot his own disappointment. In truth, this desert version of a flea circus was really no less picturesque than he had expected. The huts made of sticks and rags were round and low like the humps of a camel and occu-

pied the entire center of the market place, one for each family, the Somalis moved about inside; and in front of each were exposed some miserable fag-gots, bundles of dead branches, little piles of twigs. This was the lumber exchange.

Some dromedaries were kneeling dreamily. Others stalked about with lowered eyes, looking so affected and prudish that Manon burst out laughing as she watched their vain preenings.

"How funny!" she exclaimed at every turn.

After the camels, she was most interested in the children. She took them in her arms, handling them awkwardly, and gave advice to their mothers—gaunt negresses with pendant breasts. "Where do they sleep?" she inquired.

And when Jacques assured her that they slept on the ground, she shrugged her shoulders, to indicate that she was not going to be taken in by such nonsense.

"Without even a mattress? Imagine!"

She poured forth an incessant stream of questions about the habits of the "savages." She wanted to taste what they ate, look under their tents, find out what the women put on their hair to make it so oily. Everything she discovered seemed droll and wonderful to her. As she distributed her money recklessly, the beggars crowded about, their little bundles on

their backs, repeating in whining voices: "Meskine . . . Meskine . . ." * The naked black boys galloped behind, holding out their light-palmed hands; then came the ulcerous, the blind, the mutilated sharp-shooters with empty dangling arms, all of them bawling: "*Baksheesh, moussié!*"

The only ones who did not beg were the nomads, the Somalis from the interior, who came down to Djibouti only at very infrequent intervals to sell some dried skins or faggots in exchange for small bags of salt or pieces of cotton goods and then vanished again into their solitude—their shields at their sides and lances on their shoulders. With some slight trepidation, Florence examined these desert goatherds and found them good-looking. The white-robed Dankalis in particular looked very imposing as they leaned disdainfully on their shepherd's staffs. Many of them bleach their hair with lime and the stupefied girl gazed uncomprehendingly at these strange blond negroes whose eyes followed her everywhere.

In the little streets into which they wandered the shop windows were full of honey cakes and date puddings. The Arabs sat in front of the native cafés drinking coffee out of tiny cups and smoking their narghilas. Across the street, some Jews were working in their covered stalls—real Jews who looked as if

* mesquin—poor.

they had just arrived from Palestine the night before, with dirty curls falling from their temples, and long hooked noses. Some Persians in fur caps were weaving carpets in the open, and some handsome, curly-headed Abyssinians, dressed in European fashion—a white cape thrown over their shoulders and with large gray felt hats—were presiding haughtily over a stock of decorated gourds and ivory objects which were being offered for sale by negroes who looked like slaves.

At every turn there was a fresh attraction. Even the little Afar who had attached himself affectionately to Manon, played his rôle, waving his moth-eaten fan under her nose to ward off the flies.

“And when do all these people go back to their homes?” she asked naïvely.

For her, this was not a real country; she probably thought that all these negroes were merely scenery and might be replaced tomorrow by a village of redskins or Aissaouian fire-eaters.

“Is it like this in Indo-China too?”

“Yes,” answered Jacques, amused. “But the natives are yellow instead of black.”

“Of course, Chinamen. But are they as nice as these? . . . Is it true that they’ve cut off their pig-tails? . . . What a shame!”

Her questions, her babbling laughter, and aston-

ished exclamations filled the young man with delight. He had often wondered how Florence would react to her first encounter with the exotic, to her first contact with the colonial life which awaited them, and now listening to her gay laughter, he felt radiantly confident. He took her by the arm, and walking close together under the same parasol, they resumed their promenade.

"You'll see how happy we'll be . . . You'll have your little rickshaw to go riding in, plenty of boys to serve you. In Indo-China it's even finer than out here, you know . . . Magnificent vegetation, forests of palm trees. . . ."

Manon listened to him tenderly, and thought of *Paul et Virginie* which she had read as a child.

It was Prater who spied them first as they came back to the central square. "A really handsome couple, those two," pointing to Florence and Jacques with the end of his cane.

Everybody had begun to despair of their return and we were about to go to see the dancers without them. The broker was waiting impatiently in the auto with the director and the Peking banker, while the artistes were posing for the Fat Little Man in the middle of the Somalis encampment—Carmen with a negro baby in her arms and the basso astride a dromedary. Florence hurried up quickly to join the group

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but met with a cold reception. Her flight had annoyed her comrades.

"We're not swell enough for Madame," said Mussette bitterly, for she was jealous of Florence Bernard now.

And the disguised basso descended from his camel grumbling cavernously. "Nothing they tell us is going to amaze me, they can be sure. . . ."

Jacques, for his part, was furious to have fallen in with the band again, and it was with great reluctance that he set off with the others.

The street reserved for the dancing girls is set like a trap, for as soon as you step into it, you cannot hope to retrace your steps. The yelping courtesans throw themselves on the tourists, push them, drag them by the arm, and there is nothing to do but follow.

"Let's go in here," said the unnerved Mlle. Favier as soon as they came to the first hut.

But the broker was in no hurry and wanted to choose more carefully, so he led us a little further on, attracted by a black beauty who was standing bare-breasted in the frame of her doorway. We all entered. It was not a rich house: sacks of jute, dirty mats, and a beaten earth floor. The only piece of furniture was a sort of mounted divan composed of one long board nailed on four stakes and draped

with turkey-red cloth. In order to see well the ladies had to sit on this elevation, and a huge negress as strong as a porter picked them up bodily and sat them down on the bench. All of them permitted this, except Manon. When it came to her turn and she saw the savage face close to her and felt the embrace of that oily body, she stiffened with all her might and began to scream. So vigorously did she kick that the negress had to let her go. The artistes protested and made fun of her.

"What's the matter, Florence, are you crazy?" asked Carmen.

But Manon did not laugh. Her voice was trembling; not from fear, however, but because she felt herself outraged.

"I want to go away, come," she said to her lover.

And she went out with him, while Musette grumbled from her perch: "Of course! She must always be doing something to get herself noticed."

The incident had irritated Garrot. "Come on, begin!" he ordered, flinging some money to the withered negresses who deafened us with their vociferations.

The two dancers who were waiting in the back of the hut had only to let fall one cotton veil and they were naked. Not indecent: naked. Naked as animals. They were Somalis with firm breasts and

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muscular arms. Handsome bodies modelled in shade, with skins like the patine of fine furniture. One wore a necklace of glass and the other of gilded beads, and both had bracelets and rings of copper and gold that tinkled as they moved. They stretched their limbs and the dance began.

No music—only their clacking hands for accompaniment. Gravely they advanced and retreated in ritualistic fashion, keeping face to face, their busts high and their expressions solemn, beating the ground with nervous feet. It was hard to tell which smelled the stronger, their musk-scented skins or the smoking braziers. A ray of sunshine slipped in through a crevice in the wall and played on their black skins like a jewel, rendering the scene even more barbarous. Gradually they quickened their pace, interspersing the raucous melody with sharp cries. They did not sing, they screamed; they were not dancing, they were trampling. The visitors' eyes brightened as they watched the tight solid flanks of the Amazons. At last, their feet rebounded for the last time on the hard soil, and they stopped short, their ebony skins glistening with sweat, their breasts palpitating in breathless gasps.

They might have stopped here, but after this primitive exhibition they wanted to show us another that, in their native immodesty, they deemed more volup-

tuous, and began a belly dance concocted especially for foreigners, twisting and turning in an obscene fashion and clucking "*travadja*" as the sailors must have taught them. To add to the local color, the *basso's* voice began to intone an aria from *L'Africaine* or *Aida*. It was distressing.

"*Unerhört!*" exclaimed Prater.

Even the Chinaman who had followed since we landed without once opening his mouth, recovered the use of his tongue for a moment and mumbled: "They're becoming civilized."

As we came out, Manon stared at us reproachfully and walked on ahead clinging in silence to her lover's arm. Her morning gaiety had vanished and she no longer looked at things with the same eyes. The obstinate chorus of "*Melon, moussié? . . . Want cigarettes?*" had ceased to be amusing. Caressing the shaved head of the little Afar who had never left her, she sighed: "Poor little thing!" as if she were pitying him for having to live in such a naked state.

When we returned to the market-place, it looked entirely different in the gray twilight. Now that night was falling Manon felt ill at ease in the midst of this encampment which had seemed so lively and brilliant in the sunshine. After evening prayer, the men emerged from the mosque in a noisy swarm

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—white tunics, black faces—and their strange looks and harsh voices frightened her. The ever curious Jacques, on the contrary, wanted to enter the mosque despite the advice of the broker, and I would have followed him if our path had not suddenly been blocked by a hostile group of the faithful, grumbling threatening imprecations.

“Come way,” begged Manon. “They’re going to hurt us.”

Almost angrily she drew him back. Behind us, the market-place was sinking into shadow—a large black lake from which loud cries arose. The Somalis, crouching naked around the fire, suddenly took on disturbing silhouettes, and with the flames dancing behind the reed partitions, the huts began to look like lairs. Florence pressed more closely against her lover; everything frightened her now. Why did these black furies shout such meaningless words, and what was the matter with these huge Medusa-headed Dankalis that they stared at her in this fashion? When it grew completely dark she could bear it no longer.

“I’m tired,” she declared. “I want to go back.”

Garrot, who had been waiting for just this moment hailed some carriages. We were going to dine at his friend’s house and it was time to set out.

Manon and Jacques, along with the director, were the only members of the troupe who had been in-

vited, and the other artistes took their leave stiffly. Mlle. Favier, in a huff, left Florence without saying goodbye; but our lovely friend was so upset that she did not seem to notice it. She who had been heralded to our hosts as such a merry creature, preserved a desolate countenance throughout the meal. Her eyes upturned, she followed the course of some insects on the ceiling, and trembled to think that one of these black lizards might fall on her shoulder.

Through the window sifted the parched and burning desert air. Not a breath of wind. A tree with ashen foliage spread its motionless branches before the window, and we heard the nearby yelp of some dogs who had probably scented a hyena.

Our French hostess was gay in her account of the hardships of her life out here. Even with the electric fan her bed-room registered 104° and she passed whole nights in sponging the perspiring body of her husband who could sleep only because he was so dead with fatigue.

“Bah!” said Garrot pointedly. “It’s the same in all the colonies . . . Personally, I prefer this dry heat to the climate of Cochin-China. It’s not so unhealthy.”

Manon did not say a word, but her large melancholy eyes spoke eloquently to Jacques: “You see . . .”

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When we went outdoors, she would not hear about another promenade and asked that she be taken back to the boat immediately. Pretending that the automobile would be too crowded with so many people Jacques decided to walk home alone. We parted.

THE native village had not yet gone to sleep. In shadowy corners, Arabs were still clamoring and the drone of voices was pierced occasionally by the strident cry of a camel. The young man followed the narrow streets, not very sure of his way, but pleased at the prospect of an adventurous stroll. He was happy to be alone with his thoughts for a while. For the first time since he had left France, he felt secure. These crenelated walls with their fringe of palm-trees, half-naked negresses glimpsed through the entrance of huts, and even the vast heaven with its different stars—all this bore the strange stamp of the unknown, and filled him with the reassuring sense of having changed his world. An immense ditch had been dug between his former life and his present self and he no longer felt in danger.

Before he had set sail, up to the very last moment, he had been trembling with fright. At the hour of departure, he was still roaming stealthily through Marseilles, not daring to board the ship, fearing to be accosted as he set foot on the gang-plank. He had

told himself that there was nothing to fear, nobody in the world could possibly suspect him, and yet he was afraid with that irrational fear which even the strongest cannot conquer. Once on board, he had stood quaking under the rear poop-castle with his hands gripping the rail counting the seconds. Then, as soon as the anchor was raised, he had breathed freely, with the sensation that he was out of reach. From day to day, his confidence had grown stronger. Poignant transports of joy seized him at the thought that he had really escaped. As for remorse, he had never felt a twinge, not for a moment. And arriving tonight on the African coast, with the Indian Ocean spread out before him, he had at last experienced the profound feeling that it was over, that all was forgotten. "I pulled out of that!" he thought brutally, just as he had done during the war when his sadly depleted regiment returned from an attack. Among other things, his white costume contributed to his feeling of being a different man, one who had broken his connections with the past.

He looked at the deserted arcades, the Moorish windows where lamps were burning, the laurel-roses bordering the street, and felt at home here in this adventurous land because he had dreamed of it so often. Walking along, he tried to picture the Far East where he hoped to begin his life anew. His

thoughts reverted to Manon. Would she like it out there? That was his chief concern at present. On leaving France, without money or plans, he had had no time to reflect about anything, his only concern had been to flee. But now that he had recovered his composure, he wondered what he was going to do. To date, only one person had offered him any aid: Monsieur Prater. All the others, on the contrary, seemed to take pleasure in discouraging Florence, already so timorous. To reassure himself, Jacques tried to picture his mistress as she had been during the first part of the afternoon, laughing and marvelling at every little thing. He wanted to retain that image—like a good-luck charm. If she would only like their new existence, he could hope for nothing more; he would be happy.

He had thought, however, that this settlement in Indo-China would be comparatively easy. With the three or four hundred thousand francs that he had counted on realizing, he could have bought a share in some business, or started one for himself. But it had been stolen from him! His jaws snapped at the thought, and he clenched his fists.

“Oh! the blackguard!” he raged, nervously quickening his pace.

Although even now the mere thought of the dead man filled him with a bitter rancor, yet subconsciously

he felt that he must justify himself by evoking all the villainies of his guardian. His mind went back to the most distant memories of his childhood, to the time before the death of his poor mother, when this man who was jealous of everyone's else happiness had urged his father to divorce her. What torrents of weeping he had witnessed! His father had soon regretted the separation and did not survive his wife by many months.

"Why didn't I hate the old rascal even more after that," the young man wondered. "How could I have had the stupidity to entrust myself to him so blindly?"

Too late he had understood why his uncle had so quickly approved of his enlistment and why he had urged him to go back to the front before his first wounds were completely healed. "That's splendid . . . You're a little hero!" The dog!

Having attained his majority during the war, he should have demanded his inheritance after the demobilization, but the idea embarrassed him, and as his guardian always supplied him with all the funds he demanded, he had let the matter rest. From time to time he was indeed given some documents and deeds to sign, but he never examined them very closely. When Florence came home from a tour and he asked for additional money he was not at all disturbed at his uncle's continual assertion that he

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was obliged to sell the bonds far below their purchase price. Jacques wanted only to get the money and depart. But the day when he had need of the large sum to go East, his guardian had finally shown himself in his true colors: the entire heritage had been squandered. With the young man looking him straight in the eyes he could not deny his guilt, but he had the signatures and legal statements to back him up . . . and Jacques, his heart contracting, relived that last scene in the little villa of Enghien where he had arrived at twilight. . . .

He brooded with downcast eyes; the bright tropical night accentuated his pallor. "I regret nothing, I'm glad I did it."

Djibouti was quiet at last. The sand deadened the sound of his footsteps, the air hung motionless over the stiff palm trees, and he could hear nothing but the abnormal blood pulsations beating in his own ears. Suddenly a sharp cry pierced the night at the precise moment that an anguished scream rang through his reverie; it awoke him with a jolt. He stopped short, his heart pounding in his constricted chest . . . Had someone really called? He gazed about him with dilated eyes when suddenly a second cry, clearly distinguishable this time, banished his morbid uncertainty. Of real danger he was not afraid. He set out in the direction of the voice, and after

running for a few minutes, saw some struggling silhouettes in the middle of the deserted street. A fight.

It was a woman's voice which had called, and when he was near enough, Jacques recognized Mlle. Nicolai battling in the midst of a group of foreign sailors. The engineer was protecting the girl from these drunkards as best he could, while her Annamite boy had buried his head in his arms and was shrieking pitifully. With three bounds, Jacques was in the scuffle. One of the sailors had seized Odette by the wrist and was trying to wrest from her the parasol which she had been using as a weapon, lashing it onto the surrounding faces. The young man threw himself upon this one, and at the first neat right hook the drunken sailor crumpled up. Then, turning quickly, Jacques attacked another with a flying swing. He did not have to press the point. The sailors, feeling themselves beaten, and already regretting their escapade, took to their heels at once and made for the wharves, pursued by the Annamite boy, now grown bellicose, who, in default of stones, showered them with insults.

Odette was very pale, but she preserved her swaggering air and thanked her defender in a steady voice. She also thanked the young engineer whom she had fortunately encountered a few minutes before

as she was walking towards the steamer with the boy. But the two young men felt that they might well congratulate her on her own courage: the parasol broken in two pieces bore eloquent testimony.

"That's true, I'm not afraid of anything!" she said, pulling herself together.

You could hardly doubt it, looking at that stubborn mouth and felt hat pulled rakishly over her eyes as she balanced herself with assurance on her sturdy legs.

"I'm a true Nicolai," she went on—for she never lost an opportunity of reminding you that she was not the daughter of the fop. "Danger amuses me. I'm like mother who used to ride alone in the *Moï's* forests with a gun slung over her shoulder, and didn't tremble even if she met a panther. Do you know that I hunt? I shoot rather well too. . . ."

She was talking with the exaltation of a school-boy drunk with liberty, naïvely trying to prove herself worthy by exhibiting her whole store of attainments and ideas, while Jacques glanced down in amusement at the thin face stained with moonlight.

"I get so bored in France . . . I'm not happy except in the colonies."

This was not quite true perhaps, but her pride always impelled her to pretend to like what was imposed upon her. Nothing seemed to interest her but

the free and open life out there, and she sighed for the heroic times her father had known—when the residents were shut in their brushwood posts for months and the sight of a white woman walking on the rue Catinat would draw all the Saigonese from the cafés onto the sidewalks.

“Believe me, those men didn’t lead any ordinary life,” she exclaimed.

Her charming enthusiasm made Jacques smile. The little engineer followed behind them silently, watching the thin shadows of Odette glide over the pavement like a blue train and walking gingerly to avoid stepping on it, as if he were afraid it might be torn. Happy to have Jacques as audience, the girl chattered on ceaselessly. She varied her account so skillfully with childhood memories, conversations, books, ritual ceremonies of the Annamite court, and parties of the sporting Circle, that Jacques, growing more animated as she spoke, seemed to see defile before him a picturesque throng of pretty women in rickshaws, half-naked *Moïs* leading their elephants, mandarins in embroidered robes, elegant diners in evening clothes—all against a background of pine forests, palaces with rose-covered walls, and gardens decorated with electric flower bulbs. It was in truth the first time that anyone had talked to him about Indo-China in accordance with his own dreams.

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"Then you think," he asked, "that a young French woman could really grow accustomed to the life out there?"

"Accustomed! Why, once you've known it you can't bear any other . . . I would never want to live anywhere else."

Odette was thinking of herself. He was thinking of Manon. All that the girl said filled him with hope—if only his mistress could hear her! He pictured the two of them taking automobile trips on the red-earth roads, enjoying the fêtes, hunts, siestas and the verandas, the morning walks in the native markets—and again he saw the smiling face of Manon as she stood before the huts where the crouching Arabs were drinking their *cahouah*. He felt reassured. The anxiety which had been oppressing his heart a few moments ago dissolved and when he got back to the landing, he gazed joyfully at the huge floating mansion before him.

When they arrived together on deck the first one to meet them was Florence Bernard who had been waiting a bit anxiously for the return of her lover. In spite of herself she frowned when she saw that Jacques was not alone. Mlle. Nicolai quickly recounted the incident, explaining how first the officer and then Monsieur Largy had come to her defense; but Manon, who ordinarily clapped her hands and

marvelled at the least thing, now manifested neither surprise nor pleasure.

"Monsieur Largy simply performed his duty," she said in a clipped voice. Then, turning toward her lover: "There's a cable for you from the *Messageries* officer. The director's got it."

Jacques started. "A cable? For me?"

He knew immediately that it must be from his friend Gilbert. Hardly taking the time to say good-bye to Mlle. Nicolai, he quickly followed his mistress into the bar where we were all assembled.

"Well, well, so now you're going in for cables," chided Garrot playfully. "Prater himself . . . Perhaps you're also receiving rate quotations from the Bourse?"

Jacques did not answer. He took the communication from the director and moved aside a few paces under a lamp. With nervous hands, he unfolded the yellow sheet and glanced at it apprehensively. Immediately, his face grew pale, as if his heart had sucked up all his blood in one contraction. Then raising his unseeing eyes, he mechanically crumpled up the paper and slipped it into his pocket.

The message comprised only two words, without signature:

"Take care."

TO THE EAST INDIES

THE boat was rolling violently. From his berth, Jacques watched his port-hole rise and fall in balanced rhythm, revealing first the misty sky and then the gray sea. For a moment the ship seemed to be perpendicular, pointing straight up at the sky, then it fell back with a thud, and his eyes moving up and down with the port-hole could see nothing but the foaming waves spurting their spray. When the boat recovered its poise all its glass eyes were wet with tears. First the port-side wept, then the starboard, while the steamer tossed restlessly from side to side in its sinking bed, like a feverish patient.

“The boat is just like me,” thought the young man, leaning on his elbow.

He had not slept during the entire night. With wide-open eyes he had followed all the manoeuvres of the ship’s departure—the raising of the anchors, the noise of the screws as they began to turn—and when he heard the siren blowing farewell he had

fallen back on his berth with a jerk and bitten his clenched hand. "I should have gotten off the boat," he said to himself. "Gone to Abyssinia . . . Fled anywhere . . ." He began to reason it out. "To disappear like that would awaken suspicion, it would condemn me instantly, I mustn't hurt my own cause. After all, Gilbert didn't say that all was lost, he only told me to take care . . ." And until the dawn he racked his brain over and over again with the same thoughts, the same fears, the same plans, finding no rest for his agitated mind or his perspiring body. Sometimes he would have a short interlude of harassed sleep, but immediately, there would come a brutal awakening, sudden and jolting as an explosion, which left him with his heart beating so quickly that he was almost stifled.

"I *will* make a decision," he promised himself, summoning up all his will power.

But he felt himself helpless in the face of this unknown peril. And at the bottom of his heart an obscure fear whispered: "Too late!"

What could have happened? Before he left France, he had made an agreement by which his friend Gilbert, to whom he had confessed everything on the very night of the tragedy, was to keep him posted on what might transpire while he was at sea. If everything were discovered, Gilbert would simply cable:

"Business unsuccessful." As nobody in Paris knew about his proposed trip to Indo-China, and since he had enrolled himself on the passenger list as well as at the theatrical agency under the name of Jacques Largy, instead of his real name, Largy de Neuville, he reckoned that at least a few days must elapse before they could get on his trail. Then, warned by Gilbert, he would have time to get off at a port and disappear. On the contrary, if, as was more probable, the affair blew over, his friend would cable: "Agreement signed" and then he would know that he had nothing more to fear.

He had been prepared for both—the best and the worst. But what signified this unforeseen alarm: "Take care"?

If Gilbert had cabled this to the port instead of sending him a radio message he would have known that it was done so as not to awaken suspicion on the ship, but what did he mean, and against whom should a man be on his guard here, totally isolated and thousands of miles from the coast of France? The uncertainty tortured him even more than danger. Did Gilbert intend simply to warn him that the investigation was not yet closed? Or else, was it more serious, were they suspicious of his sudden disappearance at such a time? Or was it still more ominous? . . . With his perspiring body glued to the

sheets, he had a swift vision of a deserted street, an empty house, his uncle coming to open the door himself . . . No, he had nothing to fear on that score, no one could have recognized him.

These hypotheses whirled through his head, disappearing and returning like an infernal turnstile. One after another he examined them, extracting the last drop of their bitterness; but hardly had he finished, than the banished fears popped up again and once more he would begin the enervating game of making deductions from the unknown. When he could continue no longer, he threw off his anguish as a weary soldier rids himself of his pack with one jerk.

“So much the worse! I’ll get off at Colombo and skip. . . .”

But immediately the load slipped back. “Manon. . . .”

No sooner did he launch into these projects for a flight across India than he thought of her and all his plans crumpled up. Could he embroil his mistress in such an adventure? That was impossible, he knew.

Then there was no further choice—he must flee without Manon. But would he ever have the courage to leave her? Without daring to admit it, he felt that he would not. “Anything, but I must keep her.” To excuse his weakness, he searched for hopeful

signs. After all, this was only a warning. At the very next port he might receive the beneficent cable: "Agreement signed." He was dazzled for a moment by the potency of this promise. It was an open door through which he could escape to hope and liberty. He saw himself at Saigon with Florence, reassured, with nothing more to fear—and the tawdry theatrical life that he had so abhorred suddenly spread out before him like a corner of Paradise, a marvellous future . . . Oh, to live, live!

This ecstasy was of short duration. Anguish brutally began to pound at his head: "Take care!" And once more the infernal fears were set revolving in his mind, but he could come to no new conclusion. He was too tired to think now, he could only rake over the same things again and again until utter despair set in. When day broke and the port-hole began to grow light, his torture increased. He was afraid of this dawn—as if it might be his last.

"I must decide right now," he kept on repeating to himself.

Yet there was really nothing to be done because the steamer would be out of sight of land for seven days; in spite of this, he had an irrational conviction that he must come to a decision before he arose, that his safety depended on it.

First of all, should he confide in Manon? He felt

that if he told her everything, it might bring him good luck. But at the thought that she would grow frightened, begin to tremble, burst into tears, he decided to keep silent and bear the secret alone. That made about the hundredth time since last night that he had posed the question to himself and answered in the negative; but it recurred nevertheless and at its heels came all the other questions, all the thoughts that turned and turned in his head while he lay helpless to stop their vicious circling. He made up his mind that he was not going to resign himself and wait for whatever might come without attempting anything. No! He must come to a decision at once, good or bad, and stick to it.

Completely unnerved, his pajamas sticking to his body, he tossed about on his berth, staring at the wall growing lighter in the dawn. Below him, he could hear one of his three companions groaning. After a particularly bad interval of pitching, the wailing grew louder:

“Oh! how sick I am!”

Over on the other side of the cabin, under the port-hole, the orchestra leader was lying prostrate on his back, with pinched nose, and arms hanging limply over the edge of the berth. “This can’t go on any longer,” he mumbled in a blanched voice.

Their lamentations exasperated Jacques. He

jumped out of his bed. "I'll ask the chambermaid to bring you some ice," he said.

He rang for the maid and walked out after her, without stopping to dress. The boat was rolling recklessly. As he advanced down the corridor like a drunken man, he was thrown from wall to wall, and in order to ascend the stairs he had to hold fast to the railing, while the step seemed to disappear from under his feet. On deck, the gust of air left him gasping for breath. The wind was blowing violently, sweeping the steamer-chairs from one end of the deck to the other like sleds and overthrowing the piles of chairs which the steward and sailors tried vainly to keep in place. One of these wicker chairs was carried by the squall to the side of the ship, clear over the rail, and tossed into the sea, as though it were a handkerchief.

"Hold fast there!" cried the quarter-master, recognizing the tenor.

Jacques walked the length of the first-class deck and then descended to the third-class section near the prow. He wanted to get closer to the tempest, to brave the blinding spurts of water, to quench his fever in the wind. In order to advance he had to feel his way by clinging in turn to the hatchways, the cases of merchandise, and to the black base of the capstan. The storm choked him, forcing him to swal-

low his ration of wormwood and gall; his pajamas were now nothing but a wet rag, soaked through with spray.

Not a soul on deck. Alone. The steamer dived into the sea at a sharp angle, head first, then a powerful wave lifted up its eighteen thousand tons as if it weighed nothing and poised it thus in the air, with the prow towards the sky. After a moment, the tired wave relaxed, an abyss opened up under the hull, and the steel body fell back with all its weight in a roar of crashing billows.

Blinded and soaked to the skin, Jacques stood his ground. This fruitless battle soothed him. To grip the deck with his naked feet and stand erect in the midst of the tempest lent him new courage. The obsessions had fled from his mind.

"Hey there! Are you trying to relieve the night-watch?"

It was the captain. Jacques Largy started guiltily. But the officer continued with a smile: "It's hardly worth while now, you know, it's growing light."

Jacques breathed a sigh of relief: the crew still knew nothing. The kind face of the captain suddenly looked very friendly to him, and dripping as he was, he walked up to shake his hand.

"Well, that's a funny costume to brave this tempest in," chided the officer. "You'll catch cold."

"Why, no, I like it this way," replied Jacques in a rather shaking voice. "Nice little zephyr, isn't it?"

"Yes, not bad. I haven't quit the foot-bridge since one o'clock this morning, I'm all played out. Guess I'll try and get a little sleep now."

"So will I. This storm bath's done me a lot of good. Good night, Captain."

The captain's kind words had added to the ministrations of the tempest in healing his wounds and soothing his nerves.

"No, they don't know anything," he repeated to himself as he went back to the cabin:

He was still shivering in his wet linen, but this time only with cold, and his exhausted body promised him sleep. As he opened the door, his sick companion said:

"Do you think I'd be better in the open air?"

Jacques assented quickly, glad to be rid of him: "Certainly. It bucked me up beautifully."

While his friend got up, trembling with every motion of the ship, Jacques took off his wet pajamas and slipped naked into the sheets, drawing his blanket up to his chin. The sensation of being cold and tired filled him with animal satisfaction. "At last I'll be able to sleep."

He lay motionless, his back turned to the daylight and his eyes shut. At the bottom of his heart

there was still the ugly whisper of that submerged warning: "Take care . . ." If he allowed it to glide into his mind, he was lost; so he shut the black door with all his strength. "It shall not enter!" To stifle that voice he crowded a score of ideas into his head. Gradually, it was blotted out, it grew distant . . . He thought of the tempest, of the cordial manner of the captain. "As long as this bad weather keeps up and the captain continues to smile at me . . ."

The rough motion of the ship reassured him—the dangerous tempest somehow neutralized the other peril. Huddled in his berth, he surrendered himself to the big steamer, heaving and pitching with it, clearing the moving barriers with one enormous bound. Sometimes it seemed as if everything were sinking, that the boat would never rise again.

"Oh! if it were only true!" he prayed fervently.

And he fell asleep filled with the hope of this happy death, dreaming that he was clasping Manon in his arms and reassuring her by repeating softly until the final crash: "Don't be afraid, my darling, don't be afraid . . ."

THE storm had been blowing hard all day, which was the time it took for the boat to clear the Gulf of Aden where it had encountered the bad weather. I had to hold fast to the furniture while dressing

and the bathroom water rushed out in huge spurts, as if it still retained its maritime fury. Thinking that I was sick, Garrot knocked on my door and we went up on deck together.

There were already several passengers on the promenade deck and the young people had started a game of hop-scotch, in spite of the fact that a sudden squall would sometimes send them tumbling down on the wet floor. The wind was howling. You could hear the blinds rattling all around, as the cabin-boys rolled them up hastily, climbing upon the rail at the risk of being blown away. It had been necessary to roll back the blinds which hid the third-class deck, and from our glass balcony, the bared prow suddenly appeared before us in its picturesque disorder—all the varying costumes and races jumbled together. There were Chinese and Malabars sleeping on the covers of the holds, curled up in a ball under their blankets, with a small valise or clothes bundle as pillow. Levantines buried in their fezzes, turbaned Indians, Malays in violet caps, and Annamites with only a dirty wisp of straw for head-dress, huddled one against the other like sheep. A half-naked little negro had turned aside—approximately towards Mecca—to pray, and he was bowing, prostrating, and stretching out his arms with no more

embarrassment than if he were in a mosque. Near him a gleeful Chinaman with bristling hair, dressed in a bottle-green coat, was amusing himself by scratching his bare feet. I felt sorry for them.

"Those fellows down there are the happiest," the broker said to me. He seemed rather sullen this morning, and as the atrocious Prater radiated an exasperating cheer—his enormous lips spread out like a slice of raw meat—I wondered whether he had received news from Shanghai.

A few of the women were promenading, their skirts blown out by the wind, but most of them rested motionless in the steamer-chairs, a bit pale, with their eyes closed so as not to see the frightful rocking of the horizon. Odette, who was walking in front of me, looked at them with a restrained smile. When she got to the front of the boat she stopped and leaned over the railing. With mouth half-open, and nostrils quivering, her tense face drank in the tempest, and when a violent gust of wind sometimes jerked her head back, she would lower her eye-lids voluptuously.

Only in rough weather does a ship really show its strength. Standing in the middle of the deck, you can measure the pitching as accurately as on a scale. First the bow gives way, sinks, and the deck

inclining with it, descends like a continuous sliding path from the bar to the saloon. Below, the prow digs ruthlessly through the foaming water; high above, the stern protrudes like a monstrous elevator. Now comes the worst moment. The ocean poises its liquid wall over the forecandle ready to engulf it . . . Then, just in time, the front of the ship rises out of the water, reaches its level, plunges through the current, rises still higher, and the prow cuts its triangle right into the sky. Now the steamer reverses as if the weights had been shifted; the rump of the monster falls back into the water and you see a large river of foam trailing behind—the boiling wake of the ship.

Exaggerating her sprightliness to annoy the other passengers, Mlle. Nicolai marched about merrily. When the luncheon gong sounded, she cried: “Splendid! This weather’s given me an appetite . . .”

Perhaps, after all, she had other reasons for being cheerful. But when we came up after lunch and the purser announced that there would be no concert on account of the rough weather, she seemed very provoked.

“How tiresome of these women to get sick for no reason at all,” she said in a loud voice.

Then she secluded herself in the saloon with a book and did not reappear until evening.

NEXT morning the wind quieted down. The sea grew calm again. It was like a radiant summer day. For several hours we continued to skirt the African coast, and even without binoculars we could see the Somalis moving about on the blinding sand near their huts, and other ant-like figures pursuing their way over distant trails. Then came a stretch of rocky land as barren as the desert. Reddish cliffs where not even a bush could take root. Around us the native barks danced up and down in the foaming ship's wake and the black fishermen abandoned their oars to greet us with loud cries. One of them, standing upright in his canoe, shouted with all his strength. "*Bonjour, bonsoir! . . . Bonjour, bonsoir! . . .*"

The two phrases must have constituted his entire vocabulary, for he repeated them without stopping, ten, twenty times over again, gesticulating as he bobbed up and down like a cork. Their canoes fought against the speed of the eddy-current which hurled them one against the other. I gave a last backward glance at this crowd of bawling negroes with their arms upraised to the sky.

Soon we arrived at the extreme eastern tip of Africa: Gardafui. Between two similar rocky cliffs—the false Gardafui and the true—which looked so alike that they could not be distinguished in foggy weather, we could see the wreck of a Japanese ship

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which had dashed itself against the coast, thinking that it was rounding the cape. Ten other ships had met a similar fate during the past few years. The thought of this made Prater pensive.

"What poor creatures we are!" he lamented in English, wagging his enormous head. "Those bandit Somalis leave the unfortunate people on the roof completely naked. They pillage everything, Monsieur . . . *Ach!* It's an awful thing . . ."

Garrot began to snicker. "Don't listen to him, it isn't true," he contradicted, with a vulgar wink.

Although accustomed to all this bickering, his associate looked at him angrily. "Silly ass!" he mumbled again in English. "What, shipwrecks never happen, I suppose?"

"Of course not," answered the broker stubbornly. "They only happen in novels." And turning to the doctor who was standing nearby: "Isn't that so, doctor?"

The latter who had turned his back to the sea, uttered an evasive grumble. "Well . . . hmm . . . that depends."

"At least you haven't ever been in one?"

The doctor put on his most disgusted expression as he recollected. "Why yes, torpedoed, in 1916. Four hundred of the passengers and crew went down. Not counting the negroes and Chinamen, of course."

The Pekin banker shuddered. He didn't like danger. "It must have been frightful."

The doctor pulled a still longer face. "Frightful isn't the word. Comical rather, or unexpected, I should say. What breaks forth in all its glory at that time"—he looked about to make sure there were no ladies within hearing—"is the colossal stupidity of the women. My word, it's enough to shame the canaries and make the sheep jealous! The first night, they were very cautious and constituted themselves the ship's police, dragging the captain out on the foot-bridge every time they saw a poor little streak of light gleaming through the port-hole. They dared not even talk out loud, for fear that a Boche submarine should overhear them. But two days later they had forgotten all about the danger, and if they had been allowed, would have illuminated the whole deck if only to astonish the neutrals."

"And when the boat was torpedoed?" inquired Prater anxiously.

"Tranquil as goldfish, my dear man. They asked you charming questions: 'Is it true, doctor, that we have been torpedoed? . . . Would you advise me to take my coat?' And very docilely, their little bags in their hands, they walked over to where the life-boats were being lowered, without a scream or sob."

"Then they were brave, weren't they?"

The doctor would not admit it. He shrugged his shoulders. "Unconscious, rather. Of course, some of them locked themselves into their cabins and refused to come out until the end. But then so did the men. As long as they were in their little rooms with their heads buried under the pillows, the poor fools thought themselves safe . . . And a good thing, too . . . the best thing for everyone concerned, in fact."

The brusqueness of this funeral oration shocked the Pekin banker. "Why?" he asked.

"Because of life-boats and statistics," replied the doctor, rubbing his nose. "If those poor imbeciles hadn't barricaded themselves in their cabins and if some others crazed with fear hadn't hurled themselves into the ocean from the top deck, there would never have been enough room for all on the rafts and life-boats. But as you can well imagine, even since the first shipwrecks, accurate statistics have been kept on the percentage of people who allow themselves to be saved. Well, at each catastrophe the proportion remains constant. There are always some who jump into the water, others who lock themselves in their rooms, and still others who refuse desperately to leave the ship, persuaded—in spite of all they are told—that they are safer on the steamer than in that tiny launch dangling at the end of two ropes. There-

fore only the remainder have to be taken aboard the life-boats."

This cheerful description of shipwrecks left his hearers speechless, which only served to encourage the narrator.

"The most dangerous people at such times," he continued as naturally as you please, "are those who wish to maintain order. They're the real menace . . . They rush about green with anguish, a revolver in their hands, and fall on the other passengers shouting: 'Don't be afraid! For God's sake be calm! . . . Follow me!' Outside of the fact that they don't know themselves where they are going, they usually end by blowing out the brains of some poor devil who hasn't done a thing. Therefore, the simplest thing to do when you see one of these self-appointed saviours is to throw him over the rail immediately, or else give him a solid crack on the head with a boat-hook. After that, all will be tranquil . . ."

The doctor was slyly enjoying his success. "Curious, curious," he continued reminiscently, shaking his head. "How you can be deceived in men! For example, do you know who was the bravest on board? The dining-room steward—a fat, rather bald fellow—who immediately began to supervise the work of stopping the leaks, while the big strapping passengers on whom the captain had counted the most began to

run like sheep seized with turnsickness, dragging their life-saving belts and carrying a lifebuoy on each arm."

At that moment—none too soon—the purser who had just come up interrupted him: "See here, you exaggerate! . . . You forget all those who prepared to drown rather than get into an overcharged life-boat which their added weight might have capsized . . . And the heroic postmaster who let the launches depart without him in order to go back to his cabin for the papers which had been entrusted to him. And the captain who—"

Our misanthrope pulled his gold-braided cap over his eyes. "Yes," he acknowledged in spite of himself. "It's sad to have to admit it, but some brave men still exist."

The preceding day we had seen nothing of the artistes because the majority of them must have been seasick. Consequently, when along with the fine weather the lovely Manon reappeared on deck all the Shanghaians rushed to her side.

"Well, how are you? Were you awfully sick? . . . Poor dear!"

She looked like a cross child and answered petulantly. It did not require very much coaxing for her to unburden her heart to us.

"They've been nasty to me," she confided. And

very much upset, she began to recite her tale of woe: Mlle. Favier and that wretched Musette had not forgiven her for the affront of Djibouti, and last night, while she was so sick, they had plagued her in all sorts of ways, though she couldn't tell us precisely.

"That Favier girl who was your best friend?"

"Of course. She's always been jealous of me."

Never had she suffered so much from this forced association. In her cabin, in the dining-room, under the awning, everywhere, she had to meet hostile faces and suffer their nasty looks and insinuating remarks. Even this daily promenade on our deck, which had always been so pleasurable, now became painful to her for she seemed to sense hostility in the glances of certain ladies and she was continually afraid that someone might insult her.

"I'd like to see them try it!" raged the purser.

"Oh!" continued the poor girl in a tremulous voice, "women are so malicious!"

I was astonished to see that Jacques Largy appeared not in the least moved, he who usually grew anxious at the least sigh of his mistress. He remained silent, occasionally forcing a smile, and listened to Manon, his mind evidently elsewhere.

"What a pity that we can't manage to have her installed in first-class with us," suggested Garrot aside.

Nobody took up the suggestion. Manon had opened

her violet eyes wide with hope, but Jacques, his head lowered, had not moved a muscle—perhaps he had not heard. After looking at him out of the corner of her eye, she murmured sadly: “And how egotistical men are too . . .”

Manon was not mistaken in thinking that certain of the women in first-class complained about the intrusion of the artistes. Some were jealous, others snobbish. A few peevish ladies feared the effect on their young daughters—more sophisticated than they imagined—and others trembled for their husbands. There were also a few rebuffed male Lotharios who revenged themselves in their own fashion. For example, Odette’s mother had thanked Jacques Largy cordially for his intervention at Djibouti, but the step-father, angry at having been repulsed by Mlle. Favier, had refused to join his wife under the pretext that he didn’t wish to have anything to do with “those people.”

“He’s not of my class,” the former mail-sorter remarked in speaking of Jacques Largy.

“That’s true,” Odette retorted immediately, “he’s a man of breeding.”

And from that time on, if only to show how little she cared for her step-father’s suggestions, the girl never left the company of the artistes and would even go down under the second-class awning to watch

them rehearse. Florence Bernard, however, no longer accorded her the smiling welcome of the first days. Since Djibouti, her liking for Odette had died out. She had nothing to reproach her for except having been pulled out of a bad fix by Jacques but it was precisely this which provoked her—that her lover should have risked himself for someone else. And it must have been equally vexing, when we conversed in the evening on the terrace of the bar, to hear the little colonial joining in all our discussions while she had to remain dumb because she could never follow these masculine conversations. In return, Manon amused herself by criticizing the girl's figure. When she watched her dance, she would murmur: "How flat she is! You always seem to be looking at her back."

Odette noticed none of this, or at least she pretended not to. Doubtless, with her quick wit, some sharp reply, some stinging word, must have risen often to her lips when Manon affected not to hear or began to hum as she turned her head the other way. But Odette knew how to restrain herself. She was anxious to avoid any incident which would oblige her to break with our group. People might gossip and her mother reproach her in private, but she returned nevertheless.

Seated with her legs crossed boldly at the table

or even on the rail—at the risk of falling—she would listen to the Shanghaians, her small face tilted attentively. Garrot, who had known her as a child, playing on the deck with other pig-tailed little girls, would occasionally refuse to take her seriously; but that did not prevent her from speaking with assurance and putting up a swaggering front before these men. What shocked her particularly was that they talked endlessly about money in front of the artistes who had none. She suffered especially for Jacques. Because he generally remained silent, much more absorbed than he had been during the Red Sea crossing, she supposed that it was on account of his embarrassment, and she exercised her wits in guessing what he would have liked to retort. It was not his own ideas that she defended however; it was those that she supposed he had.

Perhaps to please Florence Bernard, the broker often amused himself by teasing the young girl, provoking her as one shakes a puppy to get him to bite. When she rebuked him for their continued talk of big money, he folded his long mouth maliciously and said with a half-smile:

“Mademoiselle, in your cradle you received the most precious of all gifts.” He paused for a moment to let it take effect, then continued in the same husky voice: “You received the gift of money. Whether you

like it or no, that is the highest good. All the rest is sham. In our civilized society where all desirable things are put in a cage, there is only one key to unlock it: money. It's the magic wand of modern fairy tales. The wand has touched you, be happy."

The credulous Manon, always convinced as soon as anyone had spoken, voiced her naïve approval. "That's true. One is nothing without money."

At the word money, Prater opened his eyes, as if it were a question of its distribution. Odette bowed her head and tapped her heel against the trellis-work. Jacques was silent.

"One must be rich," continued the jovial broker. "The millionaire possesses more dreams in his check-book than the poet has in his soul. What is a dream? A happiness which you imagine. The rich man signs a check: happiness is his. Today money takes first place everywhere. No need of other qualities when you're rich. Isn't that true, Prater?"

At that moment the young girl raised her head and answered for him: "One can dispense with being well-bred and intelligent. That's what you mean to say, isn't it?"

Her impertinent stare and cutting voice gave added emphasis to the pointed remark. It amused us, particularly since it was at someone's else expense.

"Believe me, Monsieur Garrot," she went on with-

out changing her tone, "you have been busy with so many things in your lifetime that perhaps you haven't had time to think of the inner life. What one has is commonplace, the only thing that matters is what one desires."

Florence looked at her, crushed, and thought: "How insolent she is!" but the broker kept his temper. He said teasingly:

"Don't speak lightly of the good fairy's gift, Mademoiselle Odette. When the time comes for you to get married, your money will count more than anything else."

Even this unseemly remark didn't stump her. She retorted: "Of course, your extensive personal experience permits you to be so direct. You feel a grand passion . . . A check. And presto, you are loved . . ."

This time the delighted Prater indicated his approval. "*Schön gesagt!*" he cried, rolling his head.

And the little colonial, proud of her tilt, smoothed her hair with a familiar gesture. Clearly her enthusiasm was out of place here among these blasé men, these intrepid voyagers who had no curiosity left. Her own pleasures consisted in walking over the mountainous paths of Darlac, hunting, riding, evening sailings on the Cambodian River or in the in-

undated forests. Her conversation at Djibouti was enough to acquaint her with Jacques' tastes and she tried to model her own after them. However, he was always taciturn now, and seemed disinterested in all her discussions.

What can be the matter with him? The young girl wondered. Like a secret hope she repeated to herself: "He's been this way ever since the last landing."

But nothing in Jacques Largy's attitude could permit her to suppose that this fact was indeed the explanation of his melancholy. They had never again mentioned that return in the night. She had been silent through modesty, he perhaps through forgetfulness. Besides, Werther still preserved the same tender gestures, the same charming attentions for Manon, and this persistent love irritated her. She didn't want to admit that he could suffer on account of that singing doll and she stealthily scrutinized Manon—pitilessly noting the tiniest defect in the pretty face, searching under the eyes, at the corners of the mouth and the chin line for those first signs of age that eighteen-year old eyes know so well how to discover.

Without letting it be seen, she also took note of the most minute changes in the attitude of Jacques Largy.

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In this way she observed that every time the wireless operator came brusquely over to our table to distribute his radiograms, the young man would turn pale. She knew that his trembling and sudden pallor must have a definite cause. One afternoon when they were alone she made bold enough to ask him:

"You look worried. You're not in trouble, are you?"

"Oh no, not at all," he answered, very embarrassed.

These thoughts collected in the air like waves; Manon finally sensed the mute solicitude of the young girl, and was annoyed. She herself was too fickle to be occupied exclusively with the man she loved, but she could not bear that another should do it for her. She therefore became more solicitous and when Jacques grew silent, she would wave her graceful hands before his eyes, as one plays marionettes to distract little children.

"What are you thinking about, darling?"

One evening the radio operator approached our group and said to Prater: "I couldn't get your cables through. We're entering the neutral zone and I can't hear Aden or Djibouti any more. Bouchir also comes through all jumbled up. So we won't be receiving anything now until I can get Colombo."

Jacques Largy raised his eyes quickly. The weight

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of anxiety which had been crushing him for three days lifted miraculously. This one day of respite appeared to him boundless, almost as vast as perfect safety. He smiled at Manon.

From the forward deck came the dislocated music of the jazz band. Jacques arose and asked his mistress: "Would you like to dance?"

Florence, delighted, took his arm quickly. Odette watched them depart.

CARNIVAL ON BOARD

PERFECT happiness . . . A tranquil sea, summer skies, a breeze which seems to come from the fans of invisible punkahs . . . What bliss discreetly to limit one's like to this floating corner of France, to laugh, stroll, and dream as if the calendar were but one long succession of Sundays. Can anyone imagine days more restful, more deliciously useful than these? Nothing to fear, nothing to wish for . . . nothing but perfect peace of mind. Though we have been at sea for scarcely fifteen days we seem to have left France months ago.

All the passengers know each other now. Some of them have even had time to become intimate, to try each other out, as it were, and then to pass on to others. Some people who were inseparable in the Mediterranean do not even greet each other after they have passed Djibouti. The mother of the young English girls stares coldly at the Solitary Lady who had been her bosom friend; the Ugly Lady has taken

under her wing the newly married couple whom she had ridiculed all the preceding week; Monsieur Pasquelin, the Creole's husband, still as jealous as ever, has broken with the frog-eyed gentleman because he thinks him too bold and has made overtures to the broker whom he believes more innocuous, while his wife, perhaps to annoy Odette Nicolai, now swears only by Florence Bernard with whom she would not have shaken hands a week ago. As in a quadrille the groups form and separate. Even the blond lieutenant has quarrelled with his friend, the engineer, because he and Odette had returned to the boat without him that night at Djibouti. These intrigues, discords, broken friendships, at least furnish us with a slight touch of the unexpected. What would the ladies have to talk about otherwise? They gossip like girls in a boarding-school, and make the sort of absurd promises one hears on the beach in September:

“We'll see each other again, won't we? You'll write to me?”

They exchange addresses (one lives in Nancy and the other in Yokohama). Travel friendships, summer resort friendships . . .

WE took on some new passengers at Port Saïd and now all races are represented on board. The

promenade-deck is a parade of facial types of every color; at the bar the boy is summoned in all languages. Fortunately he understands only Chinese. Some of these newcomers, although designated as French or English on their passports, cannot definitely be assigned to any nationality, so thoroughly do their features, accents and complexions confuse even the most observant.

“Not the full quota of annas in that rupee,” says Garrot, scrutinizing them.

At first I didn't understand this Far-East jargon, but he explained it to me. The Indian rupee is worth sixteen annas, therefore sixteen annas represents the white man, the pure-blooded, untainted white. Fifteen or fourteen annas implies some degree of race-mixture, a drop of doubtful blood—a gabardined ancestor from Erzeroum or the Levantine *souks*—, below this comes the smoky complexion and fuzzy hair, souvenirs of a forefather brought from the Indies along with a cargo of rum; still lower is the quadroon and then the half-breed; thus, anna by anna, you gradually descend to the full-blooded Malabar, the negro, and finally the baboon, none of whom, in the eyes of our broker, possesses any human characteristic. Ever since learning this game, I cannot look at Prater without counting the annas on my fingers.

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Nothing to do besides bridge, dancing, and deck-games; nothing to see except a ship which crosses our route every now and then; yet you are not bored. The sea furnishes plenty of distraction. Every day for example, we meet with large schools of sea-hogs. As soon as someone sights them, we all rush over to the railing and the Fat Little Man dashes up with his apparatus. "Where are they?" At first you can distinguish nothing but one large head, a fin, a flying tail. Gradually other gleaming forms emerge before and aft, from all sides, and soon there are thirty of them sporting about the ship, clumsily slapping the water with their clappers. With one jerk of their fins they clear the surface, caper about, then dive back again, and in the transparent water their black masses take on rare shimmering hues of blue and green. They jump over each other, carried away in a mad game of leap-frog. They are really not playing, however, but engaged in a voracious hunt for food. All the small fry of the ocean flee before them in terror. Sometimes you see a streak of sparkling silver leap from the waves: a flying-fish trying to escape. But the unlucky fish is eaten anyway, for the sea-gulls skimming the surface of the waves snap them up instantly in their greedy beaks. The spectacle never fails to distress Manon.

"Oh! the poor little things!" she laments.

The broker takes advantage of this to tease her. "It's an old saying, my dear child, a law of nature: 'the big fish always eat the little.' Eh, Prater?"

Manon very quickly grows tired of the entertainment and is hardly willing to trouble herself at the end of the afternoon to look for the "green ray." This fugitive glitter that everyone talks about occurs just as the sun is setting and furnishes an occasion for all the women to crowd over to starboard in the hope of finally catching sight of it. It lasts only a second; it looks like a magic arrow shot by the sun just as it sinks into the sea. Ten minutes before schedule, the ladies' eager eyes are already so dazzled by having stared too hard at the sun that they cannot make out a thing.

"Attention!" warns the captain, pointing with his finger. "The sun is sinking . . . No more than a segment now . . . Watch carefully . . . There she goes . . ."

Usually nobody has glimpsed anything and Florence, quite blinded with the light, wonders as she rubs her eyes whether they haven't been making fun of her. "Do you swear by you and me that it's true?" she asks Jacques trustingly as they go back to their cabins.

At sunset the deck grows empty, all the passengers

go down to dress for dinner, and the quiet of night descends suddenly. I love this meditative hour. No longer need I listen to that pearl merchant going into ecstasies before the miraculous sunset: "Topazes . . . emeralds . . . a string of sapphires . . ." as if his eyes saw nothing but jewels. I have the whole sky and ocean for myself. Clouds pass lazily, strange beautiful clouds which will break up into rain before they reach the soft skies of France . . . Stretched out on my steamer-chair I dream in peace.

That is the very moment which the doctor chooses for conversation. He must enjoy a perverse delight in the thought that he is disturbing me.

"May I?" he asks to preserve appearance. "You're not working, are you?"

As he rubs his dry hands—cracking the bones to remind anyone who might forget that we all carry our skeletons with us—he delicately essays to show me that everything is going terribly, that I know nothing about anything, that nature and mankind are equally obnoxious and that everything considered, I would have done better to have stayed at home.

"Life isn't only a see-saw," he declaims, rubbing his nose, "it's a see-saw which goes cross-wise . . ."

But nothing he says can make me change my mind; I am having a good time on board; I am happy. It worries him.

"A secret little liaison?" he inquires sarcastically. "Is it the Creole who's making your trip so agreeable? Beware of her husband . . ."

The compromise of this innocent lady effected, I let him think whatever he wishes. Immediately he transfers his attack to all the women.

"My word, this climate puts the devil into them . . . Perfectly ready to have an affair with the first well-dressed idiot that comes along."

I forbear to take this compliment for myself and do not interrupt him; he continues in this strain until the dinner hour.

It is true, however, that this climate, this sea air, and an indefinable languor unsettles certain people. They say that hearts change with the skies. There is more abandon in the charm of the women, more importunate desire in the eyes of the men. Perhaps it arises also from the idleness, the continual propinquity, and the feeling that we will never see each other again, that these few weeks do not count.

In the evening nervous laughter can be heard all along the side of the deck and on the glass-enclosed balcony. It is easy to follow the progress of an intrigue; two chairs are drawn closer together, whispered conversations, late deck promenades after everyone has retired. Every day the man is more attentive, the woman more complaisant.

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"I tell you I saw him go out of her cabin," insists the wife of the Fat Little Man, glaring suspiciously at the Solitary Lady and the hovering Pekin banker.

On the dance floor one sees hands clasp each other tightly. Can they invest the illusion with reality, these people united but for a moment, couples whom the next landing will separate forever? It is rarely love but at least it is the mask of love . . . The men are merely stealing a few memories, pleasures, and regrets for the years to come, for most of them will soon return to the loneliness of the swarming Chinese cities or the desolate life in the little posts of Annam.

On certain evenings, the second and third-class passengers, attracted by the jazz-band, venture upon our deck for a few minutes. Among the evening gowns and starched shirt-fronts they are easily recognizable, less by their attire than by their embarrassed demeanor. They walk by, not daring to stop, they peer curiously through the saloon windows and turn to stare again at the nude backs of the women coming to rejoin their husbands at the bridge table between two dance numbers.

"What do they wear when they go to bed?" grumbles one fat lady, offended at their décolleté.

Our white dinner jackets also make them envious. Many of the passengers wear these in the English

fashion, very short and close-fitting like a bolero, and the sight of the black trouser tops under the white points of the vest never fails to draw sneering remarks from our visitors. Are they entirely wrong?

The petty officials—expenses defrayed by the *Ecole Coloniale*—the plantation overseers, the silk buyers on their way to China, all follow the beautifully gowned dancers with devouring eyes. I like their resolute expressions. Their day will come soon . . . In five years or perhaps ten, they will make the trip again, first-class; in twenty years, if fortune has been kind, they will enjoy a de luxe cabin, they will have become the bridge players in white jackets whom they scoff at today and on fête nights, instead of mounting to the obscure spardecks, when they are attracted by the perfume of a passing woman, they will be seated in the smoking-room like all the others, waiting for radio messages from the Bourse.

After this visit to the rich, their own ball on the forward deck seems dull to them, with only the mandolin and the piston for accompaniment. But Mme. Pasquelin heaves an envious sigh as she watches them depart. Charming ricochet of desires . . .

“If I dared, I would go down with them,” she confides to me. “Do you hear what a good time they’re having?” And tearing off the silk rose from her

shoulder, she throws it down to the deck below, thinking perhaps of the unknown young man who will pick it up.

JACQUES no longer seemed troubled. He had recovered his former smiling countenance, and while the young women pursued us with their tombola tickets for the ship's ball, we could see him training for the three-legged race in the deck sports number—his right leg tied to the left leg of the star dancer.

"You'll see, he'll end up by breaking her leg," prophesied the director who laughed and despaired every time they fell.

The Englishman forming a second team with Musette was also rather good at this ludicrous sport, and the two tandems, encouraged by our shouts and whistles, would chase each other all over the promenade deck, tottering every time the boat heaved. Florence Bernard laughed merrily, happy to find her lover so carefree once more, happy too because Musette was beaten every time. To Garrot and his associate it was just one more opportunity for making bets. Even the doctor seemed to be enjoying it, hoping no doubt, for some fractures or at least a few decent sprains. Only Mlle. Nicolai paid no attention whatever to these games and continued sedately to sell her tickets: "For the Sailors' Benefit Fund, Mon-

sieur . . .” When she had finished her round, she sat down with her back turned to the sea on account of the light reverberations; but she affected to take no notice of what was going on about her. This disdainful attitude irritated Manon more than anything else. One morning, hoping to shame her, she accosted the little colonial who was reading in her customary place, tapping her pale cheeks with the end of a paper-cutter. “You’re making a mistake in not joining us,” she panted— all flushed and prettily dishevelled from a race. “It would put some color in your cheeks.”

The young girl, without closing her book, looked up at the intruder: “You’re quite right, I am making a mistake,” she answered impassively. “One should always enjoy the pleasures of one’s age . . .”

It was too difficult for Manon to fathom the impertinence behind this remark and she went away saying to herself! “Bah! She’s not a sport . . .” for her idea of being a “sport” consisted in wearing checked woolen stockings, brilliantly colored sweaters, low-heeled shoes; and after she had run a short distance with her eyes bandaged in a game of blind-man’s bluff, she thought in all good faith that she had taken part in some sort of sporting match.

To Odette, on the other hand, these deck-games seemed ridiculous, and she suffered because Jacques

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Largy appeared to enjoy them. It was a falling off in her eyes. "Why is he so gay?" she wondered.

He had looked so noble during the other days when he didn't speak to anyone and never laughed. She wanted to think of him always with that grave face and remote look. Now his resonant laugh could be heard at every moment.

"How silly he is!" remarked her step-father pointedly.

The sentiments she was repressing in herself were humiliated by the sight. "It makes no difference to me!" she repeated to herself. But she knew very well that it was untrue.

Evenings in the saloon when there was dancing and all eyes turned to Manon, she would bite her nails, reverting to her childish gestures of rage. She could not account for the attraction of this songbird. "Why do they run after her?" she asked herself, following Manon with a burning glance. "They can't each be happy to become her lover!"

She still joined our discussions at the bar, but as soon as she spoke, if she felt Jacques observing her, her cheeks would flush cruelly. Then, fearing that some one might divine the cause of her embarrassment, she would raise her voice and become aggressive. In her confusion, she would even flare up at the young man, her eyes stinging with tears. "How

disagreeable she is!" thought the men. But she preferred this—anything but that Jacques should consider her a timid girl, a child at whom one smiles indulgently.

"I'm a woman! I'm better than she is," she said to herself, never taking her eyes off Florence.

And she dreamed of impossible events, of catastrophes which would give her a chance to show herself the bravest, to eclipse everybody. Especially Florence . . .

Jacques Largy's good spirits which irritated her so much were little more than an illusion of enjoyment. He had not attained real happiness. It was to deaden his fears that he busied himself in this manner, racing in the morning, singing in the afternoon, dancing in the evening. At times he would reason: "If all had been discovered, Gilbert would have warned me . . ." He even promised himself: "At Colombo, I'll receive a reassuring cable." Then, quickly, he would shut the door on his anxieties, and begin to play feverishly.

Odette wondered why he was so gay.

MINIKOI! The first tropical vision . . . Hardly has it appeared on the horizon than everybody rushes over to the port-side to level his binoculars. In the swelling ocean appears an oasis, a white lighthouse

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standing amid palm-trees like a tall funeral stela. As we draw nearer Minikoï takes form and soon we can distinguish a large coral ring surrounding a blue lake. The picture is so perfect as to seem a mirage—a necklace rather than an island.

In the more open space grows a thick bushy vegetation which forces the cocoanut trees right into the sea. Elsewhere the coral rock is bare and through these openings you see the white-sailed Indian pirogues gliding into the calm interior lake. The waves break on the rose-colored reefs and outline Minikoï with a fringe of spray, a white foaming barrier isolating it from the rest of the world. At the foot of the lighthouse a European, dressed all in white, is waving his helmet. The natives have run up under the mangrove trees to shout a greeting at us.

“What an exquisite life!” murmurs the Solitary Lady in the ear of the Pekin banker.

Martyr or prisoner? Is one to envy or pity this chimerical prince reigning over his coral island on the Indian route? Prater did not pity him.

“Do you know their commerce? It’s very singular,” he said, pronouncing the last in English. “They gather little white shells (you do say shells, don’t you?) along the seashore and turn them into pieces of money which they sell to the negro tribes of the Zanzibar coast.”

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Then turning towards Jacques Largy: "And there's another interesting point for a young man who likes to travel. Manufacture some metal discs for the negroes. You open a counter and exchange these gilded pieces for native products. What do you say? A fortune to be made there. Prater is telling you . . ."

Florence shivered at these words. "Tell me, is he mad?" she asked her lover softly. But Prater didn't hear, he was ruminating his project.

"Those poor negroes who haven't even any money," he mumbled dreamily. That to him seemed the most horrible of all fates.

Garrot, forgetting that he himself was a trader in money, glanced at his associate contemptuously. "Well, that's one country at least that will never see your face."

However, if Prater knew how to make money, he also knew how to spend it, especially if he could count on his being noticed. When the last tickets for the tombola were being auctioned off, he bought them by handfuls. The Frenchmen from China and the colonials are generous and open handed and hundreds of thousands of francs usually fall to the sailors' orphans and widows at each crossing, but never before had the captain witnessed such an auction. To dazzle Florence Bernard, the broker raised

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each bid by one hundred francs, his tenacious associate raised it one franc higher, and they stopped only when the performance became too absurd. Garrot laughed, but you felt he was furious. Prater counted out his bank notes with a foolish, good-natured air, repeating: "Prater too knows how to do good."

Some of the colonials were exasperated by this ostentation. "Bluffers!" they muttered. But others, nevertheless, were astounded by their largess and the artistes of the troupe opened wondering eyes.

"How rich they must be!" said Musette with a sigh to Mlle. Favier.

"Don't worry, Florence knows what she's doing," retorted the brunette maliciously.

On the next day, the day of the fête, the two Shanghaians began to bet fiercely on all the races, but in the tumult of carnival they were hardly noticed. On that day the passengers thought of nothing but their own enjoyment. A fête on board is like a casino which has been detached from the coast by the wave of a magic wand and flung on to the sea. It is a floating Nice, a tropical *veglione*, a thing of music, laughter, champagne and lights. For three days the passengers had talked of nothing else. They had despoiled the ship's barber, who is also the costumer, buying up all he possessed in the way of materials,

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wigs, disguises, masks, accessories, and while most of the ladies were busy designing costumes, the old habitués of the line went to search through their baggage in the storage hold for the fancy-dress which they wore at each crossing.

At the first sound of the dinner-gong they all came thronging out of their cabins, and the corridors were instantly invaded by a laughing troop of Scheherazades with spangled veils, Chinese "flowers" with floating tunics and silk pantalettes, mysterious Almees revealing nothing but their eyes, Petrouchkas in stiff paper robes, Indian maidens with painted faces, Columbines, gypsies, and young ensigns with gold-buttoned jackets pulled tightly over their breasts.

As the elevator emptied these colorful groups into the dining-room, they were greeted with cheers by those who were already seated. Many of the men also were in costume. There were cow-boys, scholarly Annamites with black spectacles, mandarins in embroidered robes and derbies, negro merchants modelled after those of Djibouti, Normans in colored blouses, and several Malabars who arrived in a band, totally unrecognizable, their faces blackened with burnt cork, a copper bowl on their heads, and their shirts floating out above their trousers. In order to increase the confusion, nobody was allowed to sit at his own table and it soon became very puzzling. Who

was that excessively pretty sailor? The Bird-in-the-cage or the young son of the pearl merchant? The Pekin banker was a comic-opera Mexican, the curio-dealer a Bedouin, someone else a prehistoric man, and Garrot had only to lengthen his eyes a bit to become an authentic Chinese under a heavy mantle with gold dragons.

"And what do you represent?" I asked Prater who seemed to be wearing his usual old clothes.

"The figure of poverty," the broker answered for him with mock courtesy.

Every new arrival was a surprise. The old American journalist was greeted with joyful shouts when he arrived as a Nanook with all the furs of Mongolia on his back and a pair of fake skis on his feet; but the entrance of Florence Bernard was the real triumph of the evening. For the first time, she showed herself costumed as Manon and so naturally graceful did she look under the powdered wig and with her flower-like bosom emerging from the tight hoop-skirted robe, that she alone in all this masquerading crowd seemed undisguised. She was no longer Florence Bernard, she was Manon herself—her fingers posed lightly on her beribboned cane, a beauty-spot at the corner of her lips, acknowledging the greeting with a graceful courtesy. She was so utterly lovely that even the women applauded. Behind her came

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Jacques as Werther—in blue-gray frock-coat, yellow waistcoat, and high boots—and it was impossible to imagine anything more romantic, more *clair de lune* than that tall young man advancing gravely with his large black felt in his hand, as if he were approaching the house of the bailiff. At the sight of him the bravos broke out again.

I turned to look for Odette. She was seated in her usual place, and there was no change in her dress except for a large Spanish shawl thrown over her shoulders. As Manon and Jacques walked over to the Shanghaians, passing close to her table, she did not even turn her head.

With the beginning of the meal, laughter died down, but a few minutes later, when champagne arrived, it burst forth anew. A group of ladies, emboldened by their masks, walked over to the captain's table and began to flirt with him. A torero was teasing some young women disguised as little girls with bare knees; the Malabars had risen and were yelping in chorus. But the ones who were having the best time of all were the two Englishmen, boisterous and flushed: they roared with laughter at everything and cheered as if they were on a rugby field.

Toward the end of the meal, Odette's step-father, disguised as a rural letter-carrier, with a large bag and blue blouse, went about selling concert programs

made up in the form of calendars. Garrot munificently tendered one hundred francs for his.

"If there had been a portrait of Mademoiselle," he said, glancing towards Manon, "I would have given five hundred."

Immediately his associate drew out a large roll of bills from his wallet. "Prater, he gives it even without the portrait." He felt he had achieved a magnificent gesture.

When we went up after dinner, the saloon was already filled with passengers who were admitted this evening from the other classes, and the dancers overflowed on to the deck—a motley crowd dancing the intricate farandole. The masked figures accosted and pursued each other, on the lookout for adventure. A comical negro dressed in plaited straw, with a ring in his nose, was playfully the buffoon for a Georgian lady who dared not respond to his advances until she determined whether he was of her class; a frizzy-haired savage in the corner had seized by the wrists an odalisque with long floating hair: the Creole, very provocative in her blue ensign jacket, was listening to a handsome young fellow in a burnoos, speaking close to her ear—and not one of them thought to look at the sea, the wide phosphorescent sea where the waves were sparkling with fire.

"Whew!" exclaimed Jacques Largy, leading

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Manon to the bar. They had just finished their duet. On deck, the applause was still ringing, and curious third-class passengers collected before the terrace to stare at the couple. Fortunately, someone cried out that the concert was about to continue and the loiterers immediately departed.

We were occupying three adjoining tables. Now that the first flush of the carnival tumult had subsided, the fantastic costumes began to form a ridiculous contrast to the matter-of-fact faces. Prater had already drawn out his code book and was translating his newly arrived radiograms.

"Do you know how much the pound is worth?" he asked.

All heads were raised. "No, how much?"

He named a figure so high that everyone started. "Terrific! That's the highest it's ever hit."

"Pretty bad," agreed Garrot.

The cow-boy had removed his sombrero. The cave-man tore off his irksome flaxen beard, revealing a hot perturbed face: why hadn't he speculated on a rise? The Bedouin asked for a pencil and the Pekin banker began to drone the current stock-quotations.

Holding Manon close to him, Jacques Largy contemplated these people with aversion. Ever since his own financial ruin he had become less tolerant towards the fortunes of others. This evening he was

particularly moody and distrustful; something oppressed him. Was it the reaction after the mad gaiety? While we all listened abstractedly to the orchestra which was attacking *Carmen* for the entrance of Mlle. Favier, Prater, buried in his cables, began to grunt in the way peculiar to him when he forgot where he was. Was it in German, Russian, English or Yiddish? No one could tell. "At any rate, it must be his mother tongue," the broker surmised. Just then his associate raised his head, the yellow paper still in his hand, and confided to us in French: Prater doesn't understand . . . What does this mean?"

Something evidently worried him greatly for he, ordinarily so secretive, read the dispatch aloud to us in the hope that we would be able to help him. I can still hear his nasal voice intoning: "*Business unsuccessful. Good luck. Gilbert.*" That was all. Puzzled, we looked at each other.

"*Was ist das?*" demanded the perplexed Prater, rolling his heavy eyes.

The broker found an explanation immediately. "I know. One of your Bourse affairs has miscarried. The champagne will be on me."

But the others, unconvinced, made further attempts at solving the riddle. "Are you sure it's really for you," some one was clever enough to inquire.

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Prater glanced at the back of the radiogram and his face suddenly relaxed. "Why no!" he exclaimed. "It's for Monsieur Largy."

All eyes turned to Jacques. He was sitting astride his chair, tilting it back against the wall, with his chin cupped in his hands so that nothing of his face was visible but his eyes. His lids did not quiver.

"For me?" he said, his voice under perfect control. "It can't be . . ."

"Yes, it is," Prater insisted, as he held out the paper. "Look."

The young man glanced nonchalantly at it and then said calmly: "Perhaps there's another Largy on board. Or possibly it's a mistake in transmission. In any case it can't be for me as I don't know anyone by the name Gilbert."

At that moment Florence opened her mouth. She was about to remark naïvely, "Why, it must be your friend Gilbert . . ." when she felt his foot descend on her own and stopped short, bewildered. Without knowing why, her heart began to beat wildly. She stared at Jacques who avoided her glance.

"*Jawohl*. It's probably an error," agreed Prater. "I'll send it back to the operator." Then, turning to the broker, he asked him mockingly whether his offer of champagne still held good. By this time, everyone had forgotten the incident and was listening to Mlle.

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Favier's vibrant voice soaring above the tumult on deck. Only Florence Bernard still felt her heart thumping and she glanced covertly at her lover. At last he turned his head. His face looked so deathly white and his eyes so cavernous that she almost screamed. But again she controlled herself, knowing that she must not speak out. Jacques, unable to utter a word, gazed at her, his head buzzing. After his painful effort to hide the shock, he felt faint. "I'm done for," he said to himself. Controlling his trembling hand, he took a glass of whiskey and emptied it in one gulp. Manon leaned close to him, her mouth almost touching his: "It's for you?"

He didn't think of lying. "Yes," he replied in a strangled voice. "It's nothing; I'll explain it to you."

The bravos had just burst forth signalling the exit of Carmen and at once there was a great hubbub on deck as all the passengers made for the bar. Jacques took advantage of the confusion to rise, and without a word, propelled his mistress toward the second-class stairway.

"Let's go to your cabin," he said, grasping her arm.

Both the rear deck and the corridors were deserted. As they walked along, she would turn to look at him over her shoulder and plead in a shaky voice: "Tell me what it is. . . I'm so frightened."

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“Soon . . . ”

Just as he was about to burst forth with everything, he hesitated, dared not go on. It would be so difficult to disguise the brutal fact with words. Himself he had pardoned long ago. But how could he—in one moment—convince this trembling creature? As they neared the cabin he felt his strength deserting him; his body was racked with an almost inconceivable agony. He felt sick at heart, his legs almost gave way under him as he followed her inside. His first glance was at the mirror: he was less pale than he had expected. Casting his eye over the little room, he observed mechanically: “It’s really quite small for three.”

Unheeding, she gazed at him anxiously. “Is it serious?” was her immediate query. “Have you lost your money?”

He stared at her tiny slippers and her skirt with its flounces of cheap lace. Then his eyes travelled over his own attire—Werther’s blue frock-coat, the boots, the black felt . . . The confession he was about to make seemed more impossible than ever in the midst of this humble cabin and tinselled finery. His back slumped; in his mouth was the bitter taste of ruin.

“I implore you,” begged Florence, coming closer to him, “tell me everything. . . . You can trust me.”

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He grasped her by the wrists and sat her down beside him on one of the berths piled high with dresses and crumpled underwear. Bending over, so as not to see her face at that moment, he gently kissed her icy shoulder with his bloodless lips.

"There . . . I will tell you everything, but you mustn't get frightened. If you are really courageous nothing can happen to us."

He spoke to her as one talks to children, to reassure them in advance when they have to be told some bad news.

"It's serious, very serious in fact, but perhaps I can still get out of it—"

A tear rolling down her cheek stopped him. "My God! . . . They're going to hurt us. . . What has happened . . . Jacquot, my darling . . ." She embraced him desperately, covering his cheek with wet kisses. "Have you done something wrong?"

He nodded his head to signify yes. He could no longer speak. He seemed to have lost all power to express himself in words.

"It's my uncle," he articulated finally, not daring to raise his eyes.

She shuddered and their bodies drew apart. For a second he felt her glance resting on the back of his neck like a heavy weight. Had she understood? The thought crushed his heart. What was she going to

say? Then the weak voice revived, still tearful.

"Oh, that's it. . . . You took his money when he died."

He was so astounded that he raised his head and stared at her incredulously. She turned her innocent, unsuspecting eyes to him. No, she had not understood. After all it was natural. How could the idea of such a crime penetrate her mind? Growing more vacillating every moment, he tried to make her grasp the situation.

"No, it's something else. . . . You know, he always made me unhappy just as he had made Mother. It's he who took away all my money. So . . ."

She had begun to tremble again and tears choked her voice. "Jacques, my darling, you frighten me . . ." Her pale lips were quivering. She could only moan.

"Dear child, don't cry," he implored, resting her head on his shoulder.

She continued to mumble muffled words into his shoulder. "Then. . . . What happened? . . . Tell me." Her voice failed, "It couldn't be. . . . You didn't do anything to make him die?"

The narrow frame of the mirror reflected a white wig tied with a blue ribbon, and above that, a man's livid face pierced with two enormous eyes. Jacques could see nothing but that stricken face as he watched

himself confessing all. "Yes . . ." the tragic head nodded. But his lips had not moved.

"No—that isn't true," begged the frightened voice, "I can't stand it!"

He grasped the palpitating little body tightly and two large tears fell on her powdered hair. It was over. . . . He would never have the courage to make the confession again.

"No," he swore, his throat tightening. It isn't that. . . ."

Manon's shudder of relief was his reward.

"Then what?"

Too exhausted to invent anything, he answered vaguely: "It's a money affair. I'll explain it to you later." The words died away on his stiff lips; his teeth were chattering. It was his last hope that he had just sacrificed. Well, so much the worse, he would be silent, he would keep his secret, he would pay alone.

"My dearest child, you will never know how much I loved you," he faltered, not attempting to control himself any longer.

And feverishly drawing close to him the beloved face which he was about to lose, he let his tears burst forth; the dam shattered, and he wept as one bleeds from a hemorrhage. It was not for her that he was weeping, it was for himself. Every last hope vanished. His fate was upon him—the catastrophe which

he had dreaded for so many nights. Where should he go? How could he flee? There still remained the two endless days before Colombo was reached. The thought of tomorrow caused a cold sweat to break out all along his body.

Unable to control themselves to speak, both of them wept together. "I want to die," thought Jacques. Through the mist of tears he saw that as his only salvation. His voice took on an imploring tone which he had never before assumed, he who was always so strong.

"Florence, my darling, I want to die with you. . . . Let us kill ourselves together. . . ."

Had he actually spoken the thought? She was sobbing like a child in great heart-breaking spasms, gulping down her tears. He loved her even more dearly now for weeping so much on his account. "I was right to sacrifice myself. . . ." Then, having passed the bounds of grief, his heart grew empty and his tears dried. The change was immediate. Suddenly he felt his mind alert and lucid, as if this torrent of weeping had washed it clear. His nerves quieted down, all his anguish melted away in the flood, and now with courage and energy recovered, he saw his way clear before him.

The danger was imminent. In a few days, a few

hours perhaps, they would be on his trail; there was no other choice, he must escape. During all those sleepless nights, he had planned it out completely.

The director of the troupe still retained the passport of the Russian singer who had died at the time of embarkation. Armed with this document, disguised with an unknown name, and speaking English very fluently, once on land he would find it easy to escape. Asia was full of Russian émigrés. He would leave a letter on board announcing his suicide and everything would be settled. Calmly, he envisaged it all, reasoning out every detail, calculating all the risks and chances.

“If the director refuses, I’ll kill myself. . . .”

But even this thought did not make him falter. He realized now that it was better not to have confessed to Florence. She was so simple, so weak. . . . And as for taking her with him, that had been a mad idea, it would have meant instantaneous capture. No, only by himself would he be able to manage to escape. But later on, would she be willing to join him? Would she wait for him? At this thought, despair seized him once more. What did the future hold for him if he never saw her again? What was safety without Manon?

Gently, he placed his hands on her temples and

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lifted her face. She had stopped crying, but her kohl-darkened lashes still glittered with tears. Her distracted eyes gazed up at him.

"Listen to me carefully, my dear child," he said. "It's necessary that no one, absolutely no one, should have the slightest suspicion of what has just taken place."

The weary head nodded obediently.

"No one must realize that the cable was for me, and no matter what happens, you must pretend to know nothing. You mustn't even look sad or it will awaken suspicion. Do you understand me thoroughly?"

His voice was well under control, his eyes bored into hers as if to penetrate her with his thought. "Yes," she breathed submissively, "I understand . . ."

He was silent for a moment, then resumed: "I have done something foolish, something very foolish. You'll find out about it later. When you know what it is, remember that I acted without evil intent, without calculation, and even if mankind should accuse me . . ."

She commenced to tremble again and looked at him apprehensively. In the same grave voice he continued: "Don't be afraid, no harm can come to you.

But I must disappear as soon as possible. Therefore I'm going to get off at Colombo and escape."

At these words, she sat up. "You're going to leave me!" she cried. He looked at her in silence. "You're going to leave me!" she repeated, overwhelmed.

Jacques' eyes grew sombre. For one moment, for one moment only, he had hoped that her first cry would be: "Take me with you! . . ." But how could one demand bravery from so frail a heart? He went on sadly:

"I must. It's very serious."

"But you just told me that it was only a money difficulty. That can be straightened out."

Jacques shook his head. "It's more serious than you imagine. You'll understand later. Believe me when I say that I must go away."

She looked at him with parted lips and imploring eyes.

"And me?"

Once more Jacques felt his heart contract. She hadn't said, "And you?" In spite of himself, a bitter grimace distorted his face. The next instant he had already pardoned her. Seeing her so weak, so trusting, so desperate at losing him, he experienced a poignant feeling of happiness, a sort of gratitude.

"I will see you again, my darling," he swore

solemnly. "I don't know what's going to happen, but I'm hopeful nevertheless; I believe in miracles. Perhaps I'll risk everything and go back to France . . . or else join the Foreign Legion, I don't know. But promise me that when I call you one day to come back to me . . ."

She threw herself against him passionately. "Oh, Jacques! I shall be there—at once! . . ."

Their lips joined and their breaths mingled amid the bitter taste of dried tears. Their bodies strained to each other. Then slowly, they sank down on the berth.

Cries of "Manon! Manon!" aroused them rudely.

A laughing noisy crowd came clattering down the narrow corridor, dancing the *farandole* as they approached.

"Manon! Manon!"

Jacques Largy grasped the situation immediately and started to his feet. Leaning on her pillow, his mistress listened to the racket, her eyes wide with astonishment.

"They've come to fetch you for the singing," he explained briefly. "They figured out that you must be in your cabin. Quick, fix yourself up!"

As she arose, still stunned, the advance guard of rioters began knocking at the door.

"On the stage for the second number! The crowd

is calling for Manon!" They recognized the voice of the director.

"Tell them you're coming," whispered Jacques in his mistress' ear. "I'll go into the next room and meet you later upstairs."

He pushed open the door of the adjoining cabin which was occupied by the other artistes, and leaving the room in darkness to prevent discovery, groped his way to a seat.

"I'm coming!" called Manon from behind the door.

A clamor arose. "She's hiding! . . . It's a shame! . . . Open the door!"

And they began to bang on the walls with feet and fists. Jacques listened motionless. To him in his dark refuge, these joyous voices seemed to be coming from another world. He gazed at the dreary black port-hole. It made him think of a cell, of the haunted insomnia of a convict.

"We want Florence!"

We want Florence!"

They all yelled in chorus for there was no one on the boat to be disturbed on this carnival night. Finally cheers rang out: "Hurrah for Manon!"

She had just appeared and looked even more

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lovely now, her eyes brightened by tears and softened by love. There was a roar of laughter. "Is she laughing too?" wondered Jacques. Motionless, he listened to the retreating *farandole*. "They are so gay . . ." he thought.

Soon he could distinguish no more. Only the steady vibration of the machinery, the feverish throbbing of his own heart, and the cries of a child awakened in a nearby cabin. When he was certain that all was safe, he slipped out and mounted to the deck by the rear staircase. But even there he was accosted.

"Well, aren't you going to sing?" asked the masqueraders.

He walked past without replying. He wanted to be alone. Soon he came to the iron ladder leading to the small deck where the life-boats were moored. Here, at least, it would be quiet. Everything was dark. Only the cabin of the wireless operator was illuminated, and Jacques felt a stab at his heart as he saw the operator lean over his desk and adjust the receivers.

"Suppose it's for me?" he thought at once.

The man in the helmet manoeuvred tiny levers and some hundreds of miles away, in a white house brushed by palm trees, another man was turning similar little handles on similar dials. The sound waves, like hands, sought each other on the sea, and

from them emerged mysterious conversations in the desert stretch of sky.

“Good or bad?” Jacques wondered. “Heads or tails? . . .”

He strained his ear, as if to distinguish words in these crackling sparks. Walking slowly to the cabin, he stopped in front of the open door. The operator turned his head, and recognizing him, smiled without saying a word. Then his finger-tips recommenced their magic conversation with the world.

“He doesn’t know anything yet,” Jacques said to himself. And he went over to the rail.

EARTHLY PARADISE

THE rude glare of a deck lamp awakened me. "Come on men!" Cursing the sailors for their early morning deck swabbing, I turned over wrathfully in my bed, in the hope of falling asleep again. But strange noises haunted my half-slumber. People were racing down the corridors and calling to each other outside. What was the matter?

"Colombo!"

Like a flash of lightning the thought pierced my mind and I sat up with a jerk. Kneeling on my berth, I quickly stuck my head out of the port-hole. The ocean was still asleep, but on its dark waters hovered long barks with green or white lanterns. On the nearby shore a lighthouse was winking its eye. We were in Ceylon! Drawing some slippers over my bare feet, I jumped out of bed and ran out on deck in my pajamas.

It was still dark behind me, but before me day was already breaking. It emerged from a corner of

rose-colored sky, the dawn rising so quickly that the whole east was encompassed with light before the darkness had disappeared on the other side. Magical apparition. . . . The next moment the entire horizon was aflame. The rose became purple, the dark clouds were gilded with sunlight, and in an apotheosis of light, Colombo appeared to us under its crown of palms. It was so beautiful that, for once, the passengers were struck dumb. Enchanted, we watched the birth of a world.

Our steamer advanced cautiously with the pilot's launch moored to the stern, and we began to distinguish battleships and anchored cargo-boats, their rigging studded with watch-lights. The Indian barks propelled by long slender oars veered lightly around us. Soon others approached, their ochre and black sails swelling gently in the breeze and looking in the distance like water spiders; they were the tilting canoes of the Ceylon fishermen which a rustic float supported by bamboo sticks prevented from capsizing. They are so narrow that the natives cannot sit down in them, but must stand erect on one foot like a rope dancer, trailing the other in the water.

The scene emerged from the darkness and began to take on life like a marvellous ballet—the city outlining its roofs and the island its mountain-tops composed such an unreal exotic setting that the dawn

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seemed merely a prolongation of the most radiant dreams of the night. I would have liked to arrest the passage of time for a moment, to immobilize these fairy-like lines and changing colors, to fix the ephemeral beauty of this apparition in my consciousness before the glare of day came to destroy it.

The deck was filling up. Passengers came running out of their cabins in dressing gowns and bath robes, and sleepy heads appeared at all the windows. "Hurry up!" the old American shouted to the tardy ones. They rushed up the staircases in groups of four, their hair all disheveled. But it was already too late, the mirage had vanished.

In an instant the sun had risen, dispelling the mist, and now the city of palm-trees stood forth clear-cut with its luxurious houses, pagoda roofs, and rough-finished façades. "The late-comers admired it all nevertheless, inasmuch as they had gotten up for that purpose. Gesticulating at the rail, the English lady cried: "Splendid! . . . Marvellous! . . ." while her two daughters, behind her back, allowed their bare arms to be caressed by the midshipmen of the squadron, already in full regalia.

"Hurry up!" The old American had not ceased his exhortations. To wake up the late sleepers, he familiarly stuck his head in all the windows, sounding the alarm. Thus he came to the cabin of the Pekin

banker, but having innocently drawn aside the curtain, he gave such a stupefied start that he banged his head on the recoil. "Oh!" he cried, still stunned. Immediately a furious hand, only later did we find out whose, pushed down the window.

At that moment I hardly noticed the incident. Leaning over the rail, I watched the harbor fill up. In the little boats clustered about the ladder—which must have been brought by the health department for it bore its yellow ensign—were a number of men in white skirts and glistening chignons, waiting to climb on board. This incredibly blue water, all these pirogues, faint perfume, large-eyed brown faces, brilliantly colored scarves and glimpses of golden bracelets—India herself spread out before me.

Garrot, already dressed for our excursion, had just warned me that I must hurry if we wished to arrive at Candy for lunch. Tearing myself away, I went down to get dressed. It was quick work: shower, breakfast, and in a few minutes I was up on deck again. The money-changers and hotel agents were already there, clinking their rupees or vaunting the comforts of *L'Oriental* or *Le Galle Face*. The native vendors began to parade the promenade-deck—all looking handsome, grave, and noble, even in the process of bargaining. The passengers gazed in surprise at the shell combs stuck in their chignons, and

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the queer kind of skirt, the national *vetti* in which they were all dressed, although it was sometimes accompanied by a Provincial jacket or a white barber's coat.

Monsieur Pasquelin, the Creole's husband, had reserved two automobiles by radio and a dozen of us were to set out on the excursion; but the director appeared early to report that he and Jacques would not be able to go along—offering some feeble excuses about work. Then the Pekin banker excused himself without giving too many reasons, and Prater, seeing that there would only be half the original number left to pay for the machines, suddenly found himself indisposed and announced that he would content himself with a rickshaw ride.

To fill up the empty places, we decided to invite the ship's doctor. "Certainly, I'd like to come. It's the same to me whether I'm bored here or any other place," he replied in guise of thanks.

Many of the passengers, waiting to enter the launches were beginning to get impatient. At last it was announced that the inspectors had arrived and would stamp our passports in the smoking-room. Everybody made for it. At that moment I observed the director and Jacques Largy standing on the terrace. Largy seemed to hesitate, passport in hand; I was struck by his downcast expression. Drawing near,

I overheard the director say in an undertone: "Let's take advantage of it now that there's such a crowd."

We went in together. The inspectors were lined up behind the table examining us. Without raising his eyes, Jacques tendered his papers. The Englishman stamping the vises glanced at it and turning towards one of his colleagues, uttered a few curt words. Grasping the table with his two hands, his head bowed, Jacques stood rooted to the spot. I saw the director take him by the arm to give him support. The poor fellow was white. A few seconds went by, then the inspector, without even looking at the passenger, stamped his book. It was not until we got outside that Jacques Largy seemed to recognize me, and held out his hand.

"You look tired," I said.

"Yes, I didn't sleep very well."

This was an untruth; he had not even gone to bed. The quartermaster who had been on duty had told me that he had seen Jacques and Manon pass the entire night on deck. As the nights were very cool now, they had been quite alone on the poop and the officer had thought that he heard crying. His story seemed to explain why the exhausted Florence had not yet appeared. She kept us waiting impatiently at the gangway for more than a half-hour, and it was the doctor, curiously enough, who preached indulgence, saying

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that we must "allow her time to tattoo herself." At last she arrived on the arm of the Creole, looking so fatigued that no one thought of reprimanding her.

"I don't feel very well," she told us with a weak smile.

We immediately proposed to renounce the excursion but she didn't want to, and Jacques was the first to insist on it, saying that the outing would do her good. This surprised me a bit, and for a moment I thought they had quarrelled. But in the launch which conducted us to land, their attitude undeceived me. They sat close together, their arms linked, looking at each other without a word, and I saw Manon dig her nails into her lover's wrist as if to draw closer to him. As they stood on the landing saying goodbye while we exchanged our francs for rupees, the passionate intensity of their embrace astonished me.

"Well," observed Garrot with a grimace, "I must say that considering the separation is only for a few hours, they exaggerate."

Prater glared at him over his green glasses: "I suppose you'd like it better if the boy never showed up again?"

"Mind your own business," replied the broker, turning his back.

We entered our automobiles, Manon in the first one with the Pasquelins and the curio-dealer; the di-

rector hailed a taxi for Jacques and himself. As our machines separated Jacques suddenly jumped out of his and called with all his strength:

“Florence!”

But the first automobile was already too far away. Manon did not hear him. She was leaning over the side, still waving her handkerchief. Her lover, standing motionless on the sidewalk, watched her go away, never even noticing us as our car passed him. The doctor, sitting beside me, shrugged his shoulders.

“Love!” he jeered disgustedly. “The thing which contributes most surely—along with alcohol and poppy seeds—to the brutalization of the human race.”

Then turning to the Solitary Lady dreaming in her corner, he added apropos: “You’re wise not to give in to any of those horrors, dear Madame. They entail nothing but regrets.”

Nonplussed perhaps, the lady did not answer. She seemed uneasy and watched the strange Indian streets with preoccupied eyes. However, after a few minutes, she began to turn around on her seat and crane her neck, and a moment later, all her annoyance forgotten, she was exclaiming at each new discovery, transported with curiosity and pleasure, making the automobile stop every hundred yards because she saw an attractive window-display or a smiling group of Singhalese wearing their bright tunics.

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There are too many things to be seen at once. One's eyes and heart are not large enough to accommodate all this enchantment at one time. After the ignominy of Port Saïd and the barrenness of Djibouti, Colombo appears with all the intoxication of beauty. We cannot look; we can only marvel.

First comes the European quarter with its wide avenues bordered with arcades, red, green and white façades dotted with gaily-colored stucco ornaments, and strange jagged roofs, bristling with points. Dealers in jewelry, ivory, curios, and silk abound; the shops are cluttered with elephants—here embroidered, there carved out of wood, and further on one modelled as a pendant with an emerald trunk. But this section with its wide avenues, elegant houses, banks, and hotels is really nothing, despite the amusing procession of rickshaws drawn at a light trot by coolies with chignons, it is still nothing despite the wheeling of the omnipresent crows, the vivid contrast of costumes and races: booted Englishmen, barefooted Indians, Malays in velvet skull-caps,—for the real enchantment does not begin until you reach the native quarter. First of all there is the market, the marvellous fruit market with its gargantuan heaps of bananas and green oranges, heavy pamplemousses, citrons, betel-nuts, juicy papaws, double cocoanuts with velvety white skins, palm-cabbages, and those

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succulent mangostans that are gobbled up as sea-urchins are in France. In the perfumed shade of the market-place all the gifts of the island are massed together to dazzle your eyes—the harvest of an immense garden in all its savor, all its brilliant color. Even the smiling golden-brown faces of the merchants put you in mind of luscious bursting fruit.

Men or women? It is hard to decide. With their beardless faces, great long-lashed eyes, and hair floating behind or knotted in a chignon, these men look so absolutely beautiful that you wonder whether your eyes are playing you false. It is difficult to believe that they are assembled there for vulgar commerce; set in that dazzling frame they look like the basket-carrying slaves in the sumptuous pictures of Tintoretto—placed there only for their decorative beauty.

No squalor or ugliness in this happy crowd. Even the poorest old men have majestic faces, and there is grace in the movements of the half-naked urchins and shy little girls who dog your steps as they stretch out their lovely arms.

In these queer Hindu houses the entrance is flush with the street, the shop or room being merely a prolongation of the sidewalk, with just a palm-leaf screen to keep out the sun. There are stalls of barbers and soothsayers, usurers and potters. Strange commerce

where a merchant with a rajah's beard watches lazily over chests and baskets, containing nothing. The light enhances everything: the women's vivid scarfs, their starched tulle robes of rose and blue, and those queer festooned bodices worn even by the most humble. Everything is amusing—the Chettys* solemnly parading about, their linen shirts hanging over their trousers, some with a white caste-mark painted above their eyebrows, and others, more wealthy, wearing a precious stone incrusting in their foreheads. Nothing looks real, it seems like a fairy-tale. Only the street-cars laden with natives and the honking automobiles who keep to the left in the English fashion are there to remind you that you are not dreaming.

As soon as the outskirts of the city are passed, we are in the country. The waking dream still pursues us. Green trees outline a red-earth road. Everywhere grow luxurious plants blessed with perennial youth. Between the cocoanut-trees extends the never withered grass or the bright jade shoots of vast rice-fields where the sun sharpens its rays. Sometimes a cottage appears, set within a radiant bouquet of flowering bougainvilleas. Invisible plants scent the air and the children who come trooping up to our automobile at the entrance to the villages, offer us again the sharp perfume of their magnolia blossoms. The teams that go

* Usurers, pawnbrokers, or bankers, according to their fortune.

by are not drawn by horses; we see only buffaloes and little zebus with painted horns and shell collars, some trotting free, others yoked to chariots. Bronzed men, attired simply in a loincloth, walk towards the market-place carrying a beam with a heavy basket on each end over their shoulders, old men pass by haughtily balancing a load on their heads, and women are breaking stones, near the naked prisoners whom no one thinks of pitying. There is an excess of kindness in this sky, of beauty in the faces and of splendor in nature. How can one believe in human suffering in the midst of this green-house? Is misery possible in this immense palmarium where cold never enters? Ceylon is a large virgin garden, a subjugated jungle. The most impenetrable wood makes you think of a carefully tended park with these long-haired Indians acting as gardeners. The luxuriance of this vegetation, the fabulous mass of gigantic plants and exotic flora, remind you rather of some botanic garden in which villages have been scattered here and there by caprice, like post-card kiosques or candy-stands.

Bit by bit, the road serpentine higher and we see little round mountains, so densely overgrown with trees that they look like green spheres. From the top of the rocks the water runs down in rumbling cascades. Stop here to fill the radiator and you are im-

mediately surrounded by charming little shy gods plaiting wreaths of camelias or lotus-flowers, by their mothers with pendant breasts and gentle eyes carrying whimpering babies on their hips, and by men with faces as grave as fakirs who are simple unmysterious peasants. A word or a sign and they rush to your aid. Daily the automobiles of the tourists and the English colony run over their little black pigs, their chickens, ducks and dogs as lean as jackals, and sometimes even their children—those little cripples you see trailing about in front of the huts—yet in spite of this, they continue to smile. Never a stone, an insult, or a threatening fist. Like their island, they are born under the sign of gentleness.

I could have cried out with joy at the discovery of an idyllic school where a chorus of attentive little children was chanting the Hindu characters which an old native teacher wrote on the blackboard. Nothing but a rustic roof over their heads, and a thin piece of cotton-cloth on their bodies. It is thus that classes should be conducted in Paradise. . . .

“Yes, indeed!” agreed the Solitary Lady. “I understand that one legend situates the Garden of Eden in this region.”

This time our enthusiasm drew the irritated doctor out of his shell of silence.

“Gentleness and sweetness, the earthly paradise!”

he sneered, waving his long spider-like arms. "What next? My poor friends, don't you know that there isn't a country in the world where the inhabitants have suffered more than here? They have groaned with hunger and trembled with fear in your Eden. Massacres, invasions, famines, and torture—they have known them all. The first inhabitants of the island, the Veddas—a race hunted for centuries—dwelt in the forests like beasts, living on raw fruits and clothed only in bark . . ."

But nothing he could say could quench our delight. From the winding road we watched the island spread out its panorama of huge forests and glittering rice-fields. Then the doctor turned his attack on nature.

"Look at that!" he said, pointing with his finger at the enormous gray nuts hanging from the top of the cocoanut-trees. "Would La Fontaine have written *The Acorn and the Pumpkin* if he had been familiar with that blunder of Providence?"

After which, abandoning the idea of enumerating all the mistakes of the Creator, he put on his black glasses and grumbled as he slouched back in his corner: "It is a good thing God rested on the seventh day—he would have finished by spoiling everything."

Nobody took the trouble to contradict him; we were too busy admiring. In the reddish streams were copper-skinned shepherd-boys leading their flocks of

docile elephants and buffaloes with lyre-shaped horns. Parakeets chattered among the branches, and sometimes a startled serpent rose up in the middle of the road, as if in obedience to the charmer's whistle. At last, after three hours of riding—with an overheated engine and smoking radiator—we arrived at Peradenya where our friends had arrived before us. More enchantment . . . Butterflies with flower-hued wings were fluttering thickly all along the paths, falling from the branches, swarming over the lawns, and when I spied Florence Bernard, surrounded by hundreds of rosy wings, standing dreamily under a Judas-tree, I thought the tree was raining petals. There were not many flowers in this famous garden but hordes of butterflies hung in the sunlight over the odorous baskets of tuberose and pinks, like an aerial flower-basket which would never fade. These living corollas are gathered in Ceylon just as if they were flowers, and then the dead specimens are sold by the Singalese before the hotels at Candy.

"Oh, no! I don't want them," said Manon when the broker wished to buy her a box. "They bring bad luck."

She looked distraught, her eyes fastened on the ground, with not a smile even for the queer gardeners in white skirts and bare feet who offered us balls of burnt rubber, nutmeg, and pods of freshly gathered

vanilla. The Pasquelins and Garrot also seemed more subdued than usual, as if Manon's sadness had communicated itself to them.

"She should have taken him along then, if she misses him so much," the Solitary Lady remarked spitefully.

But I had conserved my joy intact, and was walking about in a state of incessant wonder, examining the strange trees which I saw for the first time—mango-trees with their dark foliage, gleaming ruby flowers, cabbage-palms, jacquiers laden with enormous grained nuts, guava-trees whose very name makes one think of Creole amours, and giant bamboos whose stalks grow higher than the tallest houses. Unable to understand why the others did not go into raptures before the revelation of these splendors, I shouted to them:

"Look at that cinnamon-tree, those banana-plants . . . And those hibiscus . . ."

The palm-trees were not palm-trees but purple plumes, fruits were blue bubbles, the humming-birds swept singing through the air. Nevertheless my companions lagged behind apathetically, until their unreasonable moodiness began to get the better of me. At first I stared reproachfully at Florence, for it was undoubtedly her fault, but her face looked so pitifully drawn and her eyes so heavily underlined, that

I could not be angry with her long. My annoyance disappeared and I was walking over to scold her affectionately, when the native gardener who was acting as our guide stopped in front of a new tree.

"This is tree whose shadow makes to die," he told us in his broken English. "You go to sleep under it, and you never wake up again. Dead . . . finished . . ."

The broker translated playfully, and at once, as if his words had opened up a flood of pain, a sob escaped Manon. She fell to the grass, her head in her hands, and began to cry. We looked at each other for a moment, dumfounded. Then all of us, including the gardeners, formed a ring around her and Madame Pasquelin went down on her knees and took the girl in her arms.

"Come, Florence," we begged, bending over her.

She did not listen.

"Darling, what's the matter?" asked the Creole, bursting into tears in her turn.

Manon could not reply. In the grip of a sort of hysteria, almost choked by her tears, she was beating the ground with her feet. Finally, she regained her breath, and without raising her head, sobbed convulsively:

"My Jacques has gone . . . I'll never see him again, never, never again!"

Even now we did not understand.

"Perhaps it's the heat," conjectured Monsieur Pasquelin. "They simply won't wear a helmet—women are all alike . . ."

The Solitary Lady was severe with the impassive Singhalese: "At least don't leave her in the shade of that tree, it's dangerous."

The doctor was the only one among us who kept calm. "Let me alone, lover of gardens," he said composedly, elbowing the native aside. And kneeling down beside the weeping girl, he raised up her head and muttered: "O earthly paradise, O happiness, O love. I must laugh . . ."

THE director did not leave Jacques. First they visited a jeweller to whom the young man sold a diamond ring—his last possession—and then they immediately went to a Dutch steamship company which owned a boat anchored at present in the harbor. There Jacques bought a ticket for Manilla, in the name of the Russian whose papers he had in his pocket. Not until then did the director breathe freely.

"Now you are saved," he said, taking his protégé by the arm.

He had regained his air of a mother-hen and looked happy once more. But Jacques was not smiling. As long as the presence of danger had sustained him, he

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had not flinched, but now that safety was in sight, he felt completely exhausted—as if he had survived a battle—and he could hardly understand how he had been able to put forth such effort. What was the use? . . .

“Once you’re in the Philippines,” continued the animated director, “you’ll take the first boat for Colon and pass directly into South America. The police there will not have the slightest trace of you. Even in our troupe, nobody knew the name of the Russian because he was playing under a pseudonym. So you’re certain of not being found out. And when you arrive in Argentina, with your voice, I’m not in the least worried about your ability to get an engagement. What a country! You’ll see for yourself! We toured there with the *Dame de chez Maxim* for three months. What a fiasco! We had to be sent home. I tell you we had a great time . . .”

The young man was hardly listening. Only one word had meant anything to him: police. It did not frighten him, but it hurt him, making him feel sick and ashamed. In his head, devoid of thought, the phrases buzzed about like flies.

“I’ll give you a letter to Osorio in Buenos Ayres. He’ll find something for you immediately.”

And the director winked his eye, playfully tapping him on the elbow. “What’s the use? . . .” thought

Jacques. He was running away because he had to, without enthusiasm or hope. His fate was almost a matter of indifference to him, the future no longer interested him. He had not yet plumbed the full depth of his misery. It was one of those rude shocks which leave one stunned. What did his own salvation matter if Florence were lost to him? He could not believe that he had really seen her for the last time, that they had said goodbye. The director chattered on about Santa Cruz, Ascencion, Santiago, the pampa circuits and all the pesos that he could earn, but Jacques could see nothing to hope for in an existence from which Manon was excluded. While the good man tried to communicate some of his naïve optimism to him, Jacques was evoking a hazy image of tragic years of exile—without friends or love, deprived even of his name, and earning his living by singing before a house full of boors. Yes, that was what his freedom meant.

Having traversed Colombo, the automobile now bore them towards Mount Lavina, but he had eyes for nothing on this coral road which followed the sea, bordered by a never-ending garden. At times he tried to fix his attention, to be carried away by the beauty, but he was incapable, his deadened senses refused to awaken. He began, on the contrary, to detest these hibiscus and flamboyant scarlet flowers, these gigantic

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rhododendrons and long-necked date trees—all the hothouse vegetation which made him remember that perhaps he would never again see the simple waving grain-fields and shadowy woods of his own land.

The pretentious façade of the Mount Lavina Hotel displeased him. Glancing up, he recognized some fellow-passengers on the terrace overlooking the beach, and the encounter was painful to him.

"It'll go off very well," the director was congratulating himself meanwhile. "You see, they will have seen us together all day and that will allow me to say whatever I wish tonight. I think the best arrangement would be to have them think you a suicide."

Jacques could not repress a shudder. "Arrested, dead," the horrible words danced continually before his eyes. Had he been alone, he would have dropped his head in his hands and wept.

"Just relax," advised the director softly. "Everything will be all right . . ."

To keep Jacques from brooding, he gave him a moment's respite, showering him with absurd projects and superfluous suggestions, but nothing could tear the young man out of his trance. He was thinking of Florence. If he could only see her again, just for a moment, make her swear once more that no matter where she was, she would come at his first call. The idea gave him new life: to gaze at her, to embrace her

for the last time . . . However, he dared not confide his desire to the director, knowing in advance what the answer would be. His throat constricted, he hesitated, then decided on a different approach. After lunch, in his most nonchalant manner, he proposed a return to Colombo.

"I'd like to get some little things in my cabin, you understand," he said in a voice which tried hard to sound natural, "and leave a letter for Florence; we agreed to do so. I must explain my disappearance in a convincing manner . . ."

But the director was not taken in "See here, old man, be reasonable," he begged, grasping Jacques' hands affectionately. "To go back to the ship now would be suicide. You were so courageous until now, you mustn't give up. A little hero like you . . ."

The simple words "little hero" jolted Jacques strangely. That was what his uncle had called him during the war, when he was urging him to return to the front. The brusquely evoked memory of the horrible old man aroused him. With the reawakening of his hatred, he felt himself growing strong. Now it was not for his own sake that he wished to escape, but to defy that being who, even beyond the tomb, pursued him relentlessly and still had the power to make him suffer.

"You're right," he agreed resolutely. "That would

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be throwing myself into the wolf's jaws . . . You can bring me my things. I'll let you have the letter."

It was over now, his momentary vacillation had been conquered, and when they got back to Colombo and the director left him in a hotel bar, he did not weaken.

"I'll wait for you here," he said, taking up a handful of English magazines. "I can busy myself with these."

Left alone, he read distractedly for a few moments, turning over the old photographs and cartoons in *Punch*. Someone pushed open the door; he glanced up.

"Hello!" cried the intruder, recognizing him.

It was Prater.

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IT must be true that the earth's face is as changeable as a woman's. When the man who contemplates it has ceased to love, he looks at it in disillusion and murmurs: "Strange, I don't recognize it any more . . ." Thus, while riding up to Candy, I had marvelled at the luminous panorama of the valleys, the trees, the straw-huts, the natives, seeing nothing but sweetness and beauty everywhere; then Manon had wept, and the island immediately assumed a different aspect. My enthusiasm died, and I suddenly perceived it as it was. Or perhaps its face had really changed. Or was it my heart?

Candy, the former royal capital of the island, turned out to be little more than an ordinary sea-side resort, with the usual villas, terraced gardens, music-stand, grand hotels, and in the center a little lake which was reputed to be beautiful but which I thought quite commonplace despite the four elephants which are bathed here at a fixed hour—to provide an oppor-

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tunity for the photographers. Neither Florence nor Madame Pasquelin came to lunch, and we ate listlessly, waited on by handsome Singhalese wearing white skirts and wreaths of shells. After lunch, we rejoined Manon in the garden where the butterfly merchants were covertly watching her cry. Garrot immediately sat down beside her. All during the meal he had been reflecting, later on he had conferred with the Creole and come to a decision.

"My dear girl," he began without preamble, "we all sympathize with you in your sorrow but that mustn't keep you from thinking of the future. Your life has been turned upside down and now you are alone. Not only are you suffering from this cruel separation, but you're worried about what's going to become of you, aren't you? . . . Well, we must set your mind at ease. . . ."

Florence gazed at him vaguely, out of tear-stained eyes, dabbing with the corner of a handkerchief at the mascara which had run down from her lashes. I divined the trend of this conversation between the cool collected man and the tearful girl and was profoundly shocked. To save my face, I called over one of the merchants, and with head bent, I examined the butterflies looking like checkered silk, and those queer green insects whose veined wings resemble leaves so closely that even the birds are deceived.

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But all this time I was still listening. The doctor too, simply out of contempt for the human species. But Garrot was perhaps really a better sort than I had imagined. He spoke to Florence in a straightforward manner, employing a gruffly affectionate tone that pleased me, and I began to wonder if possibly I had not exaggerated his infatuation for the girl.

He proposed, first of all, that she leave her second-class cabin—to escape an unbearable intimacy with her colleagues who would rejoice at this opportunity to be spiteful—and move into a little cabin which the Pasquelins could put at her disposal. The room had been paid for, although unoccupied since Marseilles, so she need have no scruples about taking it, particularly since the invitation came from a woman and no gossip could possibly arise. Once installed with us, Florence would have all the time until Saigon was reached to reflect upon what she wanted to do, and no matter how she decided, her friends would help her. She could, if she wished, finish her engagement, or return immediately to France, or spend several months in Cochin-China with the Pasquelins on their estate on Cape Saint-Jacques, or else give a few performances in Shanghai—Garrot could arrange anything he wished there. The latter was the only veiled allusion the broker permitted himself. Florence began to look interested. The flood of tears had drained

her heart, and quite benumbed, like a convalescent, she was ready to accept their care.

"You're very kind, that would be lovely," she murmured, suppressing a final sob.

In the anguish of the last two days she had suffered so much that the *dénouement*, although tragic, was calming. Any regret, no matter how heavy it be, weighs less than fear. In her heart, she was already beginning to reproach herself for her outburst. What could she answer now if they questioned her about Jacques' sudden departure, or the reasons for his flight? He had so explicitly warned her not to say anything until she came back to the ship and had his letter in her hands.

Fortunately no one questioned her. Then she remembered that her lover had told her that people must think him a suicide, and at the very moment of death, she began to cry again.

"I'm sure he's gone off to kill himself," she sobbed, dropping her head on her friend's shoulder. "He always insisted he would end that way . . ."

We looked at one another, speechless. Why this suicide? Immediately I thought of the mysterious radio message of the night before last, but I kept that reflection to myself. The others were also silent. Only the Creole, with red eyes and nose, was still trying to console her.

“Don’t put such ideas into your head, my poor girl. He said that only to scare you, those who really intend to kill themselves never talk about it . . . I think his conduct shameful. If he really loved you, he wouldn’t have left you like that.”

Florence let her talk on. She had no courage left with which to defend her lover, and could only sigh feebly as she dried her eyes: “You’re mistaken . . . He wasn’t bad . . .”

When we left the hotel, Florence leaning on the doctor’s arm, she looked like a patient being transported. Never was there a drearier trip than that return to Colombo. We passed through the same landscape as before, traversing the same villages, and yet there seemed nothing left of what I had seen in the morning: Manon’s tears intervened. I no longer remarked the noble Singhalese with shining chignons and multicolored *camboyes*; I looked at the others—the modernized young folk who wear felt hats, part their hair, and buy their clothes in department stores. The huts along the route had not changed, but now I discovered bicycle-repair shops in them, and advertisements for English mustard. There was still the Temple of the Buddha’s Tooth with its priests in saffron robes, but the statues were repainted, the relics faked, and for a rupee the bonzes would sell you their prayers inscribed on papyrus. One factory

smoke-stack spoiled a thousand cocoanut-trees for me, and the handsome Indian girls with their smiling lips reddened with betel pleased me less now that I knew they were workers in a rubber or chocolate factory. The enchantment was certainly gone.

We rode on for three hours, hardly speaking, everyone absorbed in his own thoughts. Garrot, who had come into our machine so as to allow the two ladies to be together, must have been elaborating more plans, but he said nothing to us. Perhaps he was thinking about the chagrin his associate would experience upon seeing him carry Manon off and install her with us in first-class—and the thought was enough to repay him for all his trouble, indeed for all his expense. As for the doctor, reveling in our disconcerted expressions, he contented himself with pointing out little dilapidated trucks which we passed at times, thronged to the running board with natives. He presented them to me in his nasal voice:

“The zebu goes to the slaughter-house, and they use the auto for transportation . . . There’s progress for you!”

About Jacques Largy’s disappearance none of us dared to speak. We rode along wearily. The same liana-encircled woods reappeared, then the rice-fields and finally the first suburban houses. The native village of Pettah was beginning to wake up with the

tumult of a travelling circus. From the temple came music like the sound of an infernal managerie, and the lighted shops reminded me of our open-air lotteries. I would have liked to loiter here a while, but our chauffeurs hardly slowed down: it was time for dinner. When they finally deposited us in the center of Colombo, we were tired and cross. By unspoken agreement, we all immediately went over to the second automobile. Florence's expression was still doleful, but she had taken the trouble to fix herself up a bit, and the effect of a touch of powder and rouge was sufficient to make us think her half-consolated.

"See, she's better already," Garrot whispered in my ear.

Manon, whom nothing had been able to distract during the entire trip, manifested interest for the first time when we hailed some rickshaws. It amused her to be drawn in one of these miniscule, smooth-rolling carriages, and she who had traversed the immense garden of paradise without expressing surprise, cried out with admiration when she caught a glimpse at the seashore of the illuminated façade of the *Galle Face* Hotel and its giant palm-trees hung with multi-colored electric bulbs.

"Oh, how pretty!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands.

She seemed to be coming out of her torpor. To be

sure, she hardly ate a mouthful, and tears rose to her eyes on several occasions, but nevertheless, noticing some English ladies in formal evening gowns at the nearby tables, she regretted that she had not put on a dinner dress. She was still suffering, but as if a drug had deadened her pain. Yet the image of her lover would not leave her, she could not believe that he was gone forever. Not only was there a void about her, but also within her, as if a vibrant piece of her flesh had been torn from her. She suddenly found herself confronting life alone, without aim, without guide.

"Come, my dear, pull yourself together," said the Creole, who had taken to addressing her by the familiar *tu*. "The life that was awaiting you was none too fine. I knew those circuit-tours in the colonies . . . No," she sighed, "I couldn't go on with it, I was too delicate."

But Florence would not pull herself together. She derived a certain pleasure from this dreamy melancholy state. Seeing us all so forlorn, she concluded that she was indeed a victim and began to think rather highly of herself for bearing no rancor against Jacques. To her departed lover she dedicated all her tears, all her agony, as one offers his sufferings to God. "I sacrifice myself for him," she thought, closing her beautiful, humid eyes. Sometimes she forced

a disillusioned smile with which to thank Madame Pasquelin who spoke of never leaving her, or to answer Garrot who promised her all Shanghai at her feet. This general concern for her welfare touched her. She felt like a patient receiving her first flowers. The orchestra soothed her tortured spirit. Vaguely she watched the diners getting up for a fox-trot between courses.

"He never cared very much for dancing," she mused.

The luxurious festive air of this palatial hotel transported her into a new existence. To heal her of her love wound, there would be these pleasurable evenings, the homage of men, pearls, lights . . . Jacques was already becoming an unforgettable memory; she thought of him as of a dear departed. It would require much good fortune to console her for her great loss. Crestfallen and disconsolate, she looked to the broker for paternal solace, ready to be affectionate towards him since she knew she could never love him.

Monsieur Pasquelin was the first to leave the *Galle Face* so as to prepare the cabin for Florence. "You'll come with me, my pet?" he asked his wife for the tenth time. He was worried about leaving her with us, particularly since there was dancing.

But Madame Pasquelin insisted on staying with

her friend, and the planter had to leave by himself. The two women were talking in an undertone about Jacques. Subconsciously, the Creole was angry with him for never having taken any notice of her, and she experienced a feeling of revenge in becoming the friend of his mistress.

"You can take my word for it, he isn't worth your worrying yourself so much on his account," she whispered as she crumpled some flowers which were dying in a vase. "After all, you'll get on very well as it is."

Politely, Garrot turned his head away and did not intervene. Every once in a while, however, he would look slyly at Manon. "I have her," his little rat eyes seemed to say. About ten o'clock, we set out on the road leading to the docks. The street was deserted and the palm-trees stood motionless under the light caress of the sea breeze; nothing could be heard but the clacking sound of bare feet as our rickshaws rolled over the red-earth roads.

On the landing was a crowd of passengers waiting for the launches. Everyone was selling back his rupees to the money-changers—at the lowest rate, of course, though they had been bought at the highest. On the water, not far from ours, a large steamer was getting up steam.

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"A Dutch boat," someone informed me. "It's due to pull out before us."

Florence felt heavy-hearted going up on board alone. There was no Jacques there to assist her with his vigorous arm. "My love," she murmured, watching the Singhalese shore dotted with lights. Then she bethought herself that she was going to sleep in first-class, in a cabin all to herself, and a childish joy assuaged her pain. "I'll be better able to think of him," she told herself as an excuse.

I felt wretched at the idea of never seeing the tall young man again. The mystery of his disappearance compelled my thoughts in his direction; I was angry at our crowd for leaving Colombo in this fashion, without having attempted to see or comfort or perhaps help him. In spite of her tears, Manon seemed to be consoling herself very quickly. But the weak are always cruel . . .

We arrived together at the main staircase, where I spied the director. He must have been awaiting our party for as soon as he recognized us, he rushed over. One look at his face told me that something had happened. Immediately I thought of Jacques.

"What's the matter?" I asked feverishly, coming up close to him.

It was not I whom he addressed, however. He had

thrown himself on Manon, and stuttering with nervousness, exclaimed: "Go quickly . . . Jacques has come back to the ship and doesn't want to leave. I beg you, make him get off—"

Manon cried out with joy: "He's here! My Jacques! . . ."

None of us knew what had taken place nor why the young man should be obliged to leave the boat, but we all felt a drama being enacted.

"And it's especially important that no one on board know anything," the director cautioned us as he stood stamping with impatience.

Then taking the arm of Florence, who not knowing this time whether it was with fear or happiness, had begun to weep again, he dragged her towards the stern of the boat, now filling up rapidly.

It was Prater who had brought Jacques back to the ship. When they met at the hotel bar, he had immediately sensed that something unusual was brewing, and decided at once to take the young man back to Colombo without waiting for the return of the director. "We'll be back in an hour," he had promised Jacques. And the entire afternoon, they had promenaded together in the sunny streets of Pettah and in the shade of the *Jardin des Caneliers*, and bit by bit, Prater had extracted the confidences he was seeking. Then, exhausted by the heat, they had sat down at the bar

of the *Oriental* where, burning with fever, the young man had emptied one glass after another, and at last, rather tipsy and choking down his tears, he had confessed all, everything . . .

"*Du lieber Gott!*" exclaimed the startled man. "It's lucky that Prater came here. You mustn't let yourself go to pieces, my boy. I'll arrange things for you. And when I do something, I succeed . . ."

He had immediately realized that if Jacques fled the broker would win Manon, and that was all that was necessary to fill him with a stubborn zeal. The first idea that came into his head was to persuade the young man to flee with his mistress.

"You'll need some money, eh? Prater understands that. Well, he'll lend it. How much do you want? A thousand dollars? Yes, yes, Prater can do it. For him, money is nothing at all."

Jacques Largy, his mind no longer very clear, had almost acquiesced, but he finally pulled himself together. "No, I haven't the right . . . I don't want to be the cause of her unhappiness, the poor darling. She'll suffer enough as it is."

So Prater had figured out that the simplest thing would be to take the young man back to the steamer, if only for a minute. Afterward, matters would take their own course.

"Won't you even give the poor darling a last kiss?"

he coaxed. "Is it possible? To leave such a pretty companion . . . You must at least bid her good-bye."

Meanwhile, he called over a soft-footed waiter and ordered more whiskey-and-sodas. Growing dazed under the combined effects of Prater's words, the hot sun, and alcohol, the young man gradually began to take stock of the reassuring phrases which the other jabbered as he shook his heavy head. After all these days of anguish, Manon's tears, and the director's adjurations, it was soothing to meet someone who comforted instead of goaded one. All at once, he found the danger less imminent and regained hope. After all, Prater was right: if they were really on his trail, a cable would by this time have arrived at Colombo, and he would not have been permitted to land.

"Don't fool yourself, the police are not so ingenious," Prater reassured him. "And Prater talks about something he knows well . . ."

Jacques was weakening. The prospect of seeing Manon again made his heart leap. He could resist no longer.

"All right," he agreed. "I'll go up and wait for her. I'll give her the letter myself . . ."

Then, suddenly seized with a fear: "There isn't any danger, is there?"

Prater arose—how reassuring his bulk seemed:

"No, *galoubtchik*," he said, lapsing affectionately into Russian. "And besides Prater will be there. He'll see to everything."

That was how Jacques Largy found himself on board once more. He immediately ran into the purser, and a cold sweat broke out on his forehead, but the former did not budge, only smiled at him. Prater, who prudently remained behind, came up quickly.

"You see," he whispered in triumph, "just as Prater told you."

However, when the director appeared a moment later, he grew less assured, and even Jacques frowned. But the director did not seem angry, he was too crushed. He took Jacques by the shoulders and looked straight into his eyes; speaking in a low voice, he made him realize what a foolish act he had just committed. Knowing that his friend was right, the tall young man could only bow his head.

"You've lost your head," said the good man, his voice choking. "Your ship will be sailing in an hour, and then all will be lost. I implore you, dear boy, leave this boat, depart at once!"

Depart . . . the awful word overwhelmed him. To depart without seeing her . . . Nevertheless, he was about to go when Prater came up.

"The boy has told me everything," he purred, squinting about in all directions as if he feared the

presence of spies. "He only wants to see the little darling. *Warum nicht?* He's in no danger, the *Nederland* doesn't leave until midnight."

The director attempted to interrupt, but Jacques, feeling himself supported, took on new hope. He became supplicating.

"I want to embrace her for the last time, my dear friend," he begged. "You can't refuse me that."

Prater appeared to be very moved, shaking his pock-marked face sadly, and moaning "*ach*". The director, on the contrary, was watching the funnels of the Dutch ship smoking in the distance and even Jacques Largy's tears did not shake him.

"But that's the best thing to do," insisted Prater. "If the boy shows himself on deck here until the last moment, nobody will suspect that he could have embarked on the steamer which leaves before ours."

In the end, perhaps convinced by this argument, the director gave in, and went back to the landing to make sure that Jacques would have a launch awaiting him at the required moment. Hardly had his back been turned, than Prater changed his tone.

"Take care," he said to Jacques. "Prater warns you. He knows men and this director doesn't look honest. He certainly seems in too great a hurry to have you leave. Why? I can't understand . . ."

Jacques was too upset to attempt to justify his

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friend. He let Prater talk on, and bit by bit, his suspicions penetrated. In truth, why this hurry?

"Beware," whispered Prater. "Garrot is adroit and rich. Suppose he promised something to the director to get you separated from the girl? . . ."

These insidious suggestions had an effect on Jacques' mind. Having eaten nothing for two days, still stunned by drink, he was incapable of judging anything; he could do nothing but suffer.

An absurd desire took hold of him: to revisit his mistress' little cabin, to look again upon that narrow couch where he had embraced her so tearfully on that night of the fête. "Perhaps Florence is there already?" he thought. His feet as light as air at the mere thought, he ran towards the stern, followed always by Prater, shuffling along in his shabby shoes.

Manon was not in her cabin but the two other singers were there, surrounded by open valises. When they saw their comrade they were not in the least surprised for they knew nothing of the day's happenings. Nevertheless Mlle. Favier looked at him compassionately:

"Well, my poor Werther, Florence has left us flat, hasn't she?"

Jacques stopped short, stunned. "What do you mean?"

"Why, yes," continued the brunette, "she just sent

some one down to get her things. She's moving into first-class with the others."

The shock was so brutal that the young man staggered. His features distorted almost to a grimace, and his face suddenly went so white that the two women were frightened.

"Why," stammered Musette, "didn't you know?"

Jacques made no reply. Everything swam about him. Staring into the mirror, the mirror of that tragic night, the hallucination of that same tortured face rose to meet him. But the white wig with the blue ribbons was no longer there . . . As on that night, he felt the ship tremble beneath him, his heart pounding wildly. And in his head was the same emptiness, the same horrible black void.

Prater, who had remained half hidden in the corridor, now estimated that it was time to make his entrance. He slid his head through the gap in the doorway.

"What is it?" he asked, rolling his heavy eyes. "The girl has left? *Ach!* Prater told the truth . . . It's a terrible thing when men are wicked and rich."

Jacques stood wavering, staring at them. What should he do?

"Where is she?" he asked dully.

He looked so dreadful that Mlle. Favier was seized

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by a sudden trembling. "Don't do anything foolish, dear Jacques," she admonished.

"She hasn't returned yet from Colombo," added Musette, shivering. "It was the Creole's husband who took the things away."

Without replying, paralysed, Jacques permitted himself to be led out by Prater. He was incapable of further thought. He had even passed beyond the suffering point. From the depths of his being mounted something black and atrocious, born of despair and loathing. Thick-skinned as Prater was, he sensed this, and made no further attempts to inflame the young man. A scene might spoil everything.

"Poor fish!" he lamented, in his crazy English. "Prater told you so, it was wrong to leave the boat. If you hadn't had that mad idea of fleeing, nothing would have happened. Wasn't I right . . . Didn't the purser greet you nicely? No, he knows nothing bad about you. Nobody does . . ."

They went back to the promenade-deck. The passengers were watching the busy launches around the Dutch steamer which was preparing to pull out. Soon they could see the pilot-boat approaching, recognizable by its light. Jacques did not budge.

"Quick! You can just make it," cried the director, running up to him breathlessly.

The young man clenched his jaws. "Where is Florence?" he asked brusquely.

"Below, on the small deck. I didn't want her to come up, people would see you—"

Without a word, Jacques started to descend. He walked with a wavering gait like a drunken man. Hardly had he set foot on the last step than Florence threw herself on his breast, her face bathed in tears, her voice choking.

"Jacques, my darling," she sobbed. He had just enough strength left to push her away.

"What have you done?" he demanded brutally. "Why have you changed cabins? Who's paying for you? Answer me!"

She looked at him thunderstruck, not knowing what it was all about. "But darling," she stammered, "It's Madame Pasquelin—"

He cut her short. "You're lying! It's the broker. They told me so . . ."

He looked about for Prater, but the latter had disappeared. It was the director who intervened.

"You're losing your head, Largy, old boy. This isn't the time to argue over trifles, your future is at stake."

"My future be damned!" cried Jacques, livid. "I want to know—"

He was choking. The terror-stricken Manon was crying, not daring to utter a syllable, and the director stood gazing from one to the other in anguish. Five more minutes and it would be too late . . . He stepped resolutely between them:

“Jacques,” he said, taking the young man by the hands, “I swear on my soul that what she tells you is true. Madame Pasquelin offered her the little cabin which she doesn’t use. There’s no sense in putting vile ideas into your head. Florence loves only you, you know it . . . You wanted to see her again; well, kiss her, but make it quick, for God’s sake . . .”

Leaning against the rail, Jacques did not take his eyes off his mistress who was stifling undistinguishable endearments into her wet handkerchief.

“Florence, you must make him go,” implored the director.

Bewildered, she raised her head and made a step towards her lover. “Go, my dear, I beg you . . .”

A bitter laugh escaped from the young man. “Go,” he articulated, staring at her. “That’s all you can say to me? Go away! So that you may be rid of me . . . Well, no! You hear me, I’m not going!”

A siren shrieked: The Dutch steamer was about to weigh anchor. In despair, the director made a last effort.

"Do you hear, Jacques? It's your boat . . ."

The young man paid no attention to him. He was watching Manon who had recoiled in terror.

"Well, can't you say anything else?" he asked between his teeth. "Not even *bon voyage*? . . ."

The words stuck in his throat. He had only one idea now, one desire: to taunt Manon, to defy her. Opening his coat abruptly, he drew out from his pocket the steamship ticket which he had purchased that morning.

"Largy, I implore you," cried the director, seizing his wrist.

But the young man, grown suddenly violent, shook off his hold and before any one could stop him, had savagely torn up the paper and thrown the pieces into the sea. Then, crossing his arms, he gazed at his mistress. At that moment, the final whistle sounded.

"Look!" some one called. "The Dutch boat is pulling out . . ."

IN THE WOLF'S JAWS

NEXT morning, as soon as the first groups had gathered, everyone on the deck was aware that something had happened. What? They could not determine exactly, for more than one version circulated, but the fact remained that Florence Bernard had changed her cabin for one in first-class.

"She had a terrible scene with her lover at the *Galle Face*," said someone. "He tried to kill her . . ."

"No," maintained another. "It happened right here. I heard them."

The Ugly Lady led the battery of slanderers, proclaiming in her harpy voice: "I've been expecting this for a long time. It will probably cost Monsieur Garrot a pretty penny."

Thinking she knew something about the matter, they all flocked over to her, and the gossip amplified, growing more grotesque as it passed from mouth to mouth.

"Well, he got it in the neck," snickered Odette's father. "It's funny, all right."

Only those who really knew something had nothing to say. The doctor was not one to get confidential, nobody dared approach the broker who paced the deck nervously, and the Pasquelins remained invisible—in attendance on Florence. Even the Solitary Lady held her tongue.

"And you?" asked the anxious young ladies, ready to be gracious to me.

"I wasn't with them," I lied, to be left in peace.

Nothing else was talked about: it was the big event of the trip. The old American, promenading in his shirt-sleeves with a tennis vizor on his nose, collected these stories with a shocked air. The night before he had come back dead-drunk, having passed one half of his day looking for a minister, and the other half roaming from bar to bar deploring the disappearance of the dancers' houses. As a result he was in no mood for work this morning, and his typewriter stood idle.

"What bad manners!" he grumbled, shaking his head.

He too had his secret, and while furtively watching the Solitary Lady, he branded with apocalyptic quotations those lubricious creatures who shamelessly abandon themselves to the voluptuousness of

China. And he rubbed the bruise on his head significantly.

The only one whose indiscretions I feared for Jacques' sake was Prater, but to my great surprise, he kept silent. The secret weighed very heavily on him however.

"It's a terrible drama," he confided to me mysteriously, as he walked towards the second-class deck with his telegraph code under his arm. "But don't worry, I'll protect the boy."

This solicitude had an effect quite the opposite of reassurance. To me his whole attitude seemed suspicious, and I was amazed that the broker, ordinarily so harsh, hadn't yet taken his associate to task. I had not long to wait. The incident I feared soon took place right in the middle of the dining-room. At the beginning of the meal, Florence Bernard and the Creole entered arm in arm, followed by the planter and Garrot. Instead of going over to the Pasquelins' table, the latter approached the Shanghaians and shook hands with everybody. When he came to Prater, he withdrew his arm and looked him full in the face, his fists bearing down on the table-cloth. Prater did not blanch, but his pock-marked cheeks turned gray, like a negro's, and he bowed his head. Muttering an insult, the broker turned on his heel, and rejoined

the Pasquelins where Manon had been following the scene in terror.

The incident served to put the steamer in a hub-bub. Immediately two clans were formed: those who sided with Manon, and those who disowned her. The wife of the Fat Little Man could no longer contain herself:

“What!” she cried indignantly. “They’re going to impose that kind of a woman on us! It’s a bit too much.”

She tried to form a cabal, she wished to complain to the captain, she spoke of a petition—until the unfortunate Florence no longer dared show herself on the promenade-deck, losing, under the reproving glances of the virago, whatever bit of courage she had. This hostility irritated the broker, who returned blow for blow.

“If she doesn’t shut up,” he proclaimed loudly in that skinny lady’s corridor, “I’ll pay the first-class passage for a steerage negro and place him at the head of her table.”

In the midst of these altercations, Florence Bernard looked so like a poor little whipped animal that in spite of everything I pitied her. She was afraid to find herself in the presence of Mlle. Favier and the other artistes, afraid of meeting young Nicolai (who snubbed her openly), and afraid to go to the bar

because she might see her lover there: she passed her days in trembling.

"How I regret having left Paris," she sighed from morning to night.

To console her, the Creole declared that Jacques would certainly get off at the next port, the island of Penang, four days from Colombo. At this, instead of being reassured, Manon burst into tears, moaning that she wanted to see her lover immediately and leave with him.

This fantastic moodiness quickly exasperated the Solitary Lady, and at the first occasion that offered, she turned her back on Manon and made friends with Odette Nicolai. From that time on the two were inseparable.

Too proud to join in the gossip or interrogate anyone, the little colonial was nevertheless keenly aware of the scandal, and her new friend had only to tell her, in great secrecy, what had taken place at Peradenya. Immediately, as a dog scents the dead, Odette foresaw the drama. But she was not dejected by it. On the contrary, only one thing really mattered: Jacques had separated from Florence. The thought filled her mind with a wild joy. For the rest, no matter what might happen, she was sure of being strong enough; a feeling for sacrifice already inspired her.

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She wanted to see Jacques, and several times would go down to the second-class deck with the Solitary Lady; but the young man seemed rather embarrassed at their visits. He was particularly humiliated by the compassionate glances of the Solitary Lady, preferring the blunt but discreet sympathy of the young girl who spoke of inconsequential things just as if nothing had happened. Odette sensed his aversion and the next time she came alone. Without questioning him directly, she tried to induce him to become confidential—she suggested plans for the future, talking about her beloved Indo-China.

“That’s where you ought to go. You’d easily find a position, we know everyone there.” Then, looking away, her voice trembling slightly: “We’d be neighbors . . .”

For Jacques, this was only girlish chatter. Sometimes he would smile, throwing in a word, but he never really listened. What did his future matter to him now? His unhappiness had nothing of the theatrical about it—he was, if possible, more taciturn than ever—but such an abyss had been created in him that no hope could bridge it. He said nothing, he did not pity himself: he brooded over Manon.

Had she come to him on the first night, when they left Colombo, he would have pardoned her. Even the

day after, his anger having cooled off, he would have accepted her explanations. But still frightened at the recollection of their quarrel, she had not appeared, and now it was too late: all his suspicions had taken root. Besides, everything conspired to condemn Manon. On the day of their separation, how could she have been so cold-blooded as to organize her new life? Hadn't she been waiting only for this occasion? Was not all this prepared in advance? On the night of the departure, that atrocious night which he had spent waiting for her, why hadn't she come? Where was she hiding? In what bed? And why, in spite of her solemn promises, had she revealed the plan of his flight, why had she betrayed him? Each hour gave birth to new suspicions and fresh griefs, and if for a moment, he began to doubt them, Prater was always on hand. Morning and evening, in fact after each meal, Prater would bring back precise reports of how Florence had behaved, sighing in a heart-breaking manner if she had only so much as smiled, and shaking his clumsy head sadly as he affirmed that she had had champagne with her dinner. Mademoiselle Favier and Musette, on their parts, would malign their former friend mechanically, thinking that they were rendering Jacques a service in detaching him from a mistress who had left him, and so he heard nothing but evil lies about her, which merely black-

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ened his agony. Florence left him no noble regrets, only bitterness; no grief, only rancor. He believed himself done for; the end of his nightmare could be no more than a few days, a few hours distant, and his one earnest wish was, that as he succumbed, he should at least bequeath to Manon a remorse which could never be effaced.

The only person who could undeceive him, assuage his pain, was the director. But Jacques in his wrath had spoken so harshly to him, that it was difficult for that good man to make the first advances, and since he realized, besides, that no plans would be of any practical avail until they reached Penang, he judged it better to delay the reconciliation until Jacques was a bit more calm.

At first the director had been dismayed. Not only because he had failed to save Jacques, but because he had also lost Florence Bernard, and his troupe was now suddenly robbed of its two stars. Fortunately, his natural optimism had quickly gained the upper hand, and he began to believe again, not only in Jacques' safety, but in the success of his tour.

"It will all subside," he repeated to me with a knowing air.

There was only a part of his troupe on board, the others having sailed on an earlier boat, and so, even deprived of Florence Bernard and the first tenor, he

could still begin his season. For the rest, he trusted to his lucky star.

"Mlle. Favier will make up for the other," he mused out loud, enumerating his chances. "And Musette, won't she make a hit in the colonies? . . . Like my baritone, the one you don't know. The boy's got a voice like velvet."

With the best faith in the world, he began to estimate that, without Manon and Jacques, his troupe would be even better because it would gain in homogeneity.

"Only real professionals now, you understand. No love business. Love business spoils everything in the theatre . . ."

The first results were not, however, very encouraging. In order not to disrupt the schedule, it was decided to continue the concerts. All the artistes vowed to do their best and even the hoarse basso consented to assist. But without the two stars, the poverty of the program became quickly apparent even to the most indulgent. The efforts of the basso were particularly deplorable. Hardly had the unfortunate fellow attacked his grand aria in *Lakmé*—rigged out like a nougat-vendor and pushing realism to the extent of smearing himself with ochre down to his toes—than his cavernous voice weakened, broke, then disappeared altogether, and he had to terminate his in-

cantation in a sort of hoarse monologue to which Musette, promoted to the rank of a Hindu lady, listened in consternation. It was so pitiful that none of the spectators had the heart to laugh, except the doctor, whose lips parted in a silent grin. After the concert, the director was besieged by a group of furious colonials.

"What can you be thinking of, to send us such a singer!"

The other defended himself as best he could. "Well, it will be all right. It's the sea air . . ." Among other reasons he added: "What would you have, everybody must live." A sentimental explanation to which the doctor muttered an immediate objection:

"Everybody must live . . . Do you really think it's necessary?"

The unfortunate basso inspired me with pity. I began to like him as soon as I was told that he spent part of his nights with Jacques, so as not to leave the latter by himself. Once, perhaps, he had been jealous of the popular tenor, but now that he saw him in trouble, he was the first to lend a helping hand, and trailed along with him on the deck until two o'clock in the morning, offering him his own brand of consolation—that of a third-rate actor who has lost most

of his illusions. He showed his comrade that he had been wrong in accusing the director, and knowing that the latter bore no ill-will, he effected a reconciliation between the two. This occurred the night before our arrival at Penang.

There had been music at dinner—a happy idea of the purser to dissipate the bad feeling in the air—and the ball which followed was even gayer than usual. Manon, still sorrowing, retired to her cabin at the first notes of music, and Odette, her eyes downcast, was playing chess with the young engineer. These two were the only ones who brooded. Everyone else was dancing—on the promenade, on the stair-landings, and even in the children's playroom where some timid souls were taking their first lesson. The orchestra played some Hawaiian songs, languorous and teasing, then some negro airs, led by the saxophone. It was the Fat Little Man who reigned over this harmony, dressed, no one knew why, in a woman's bonnet. Before the open windows of the saloon was a crowd of strangers and unbejewelled women who had sneaked up from third-class, anxious to witness a fête night among the rich. "Boy, some champagne!" came the cry from all corners of the bar. After the crushing heat of the day, it was a blessed relaxation for the women to offer their bare

skin to the warm air. But their eyes were heavy and their laughter rather troubled. Bah! the children were safe in bed . . .

The first one I noticed was the Creole, without her husband, disappearing after a fox-trot on the arm of a midshipman, then the Solitary Lady slipped discreetly away towards the iron ladder leading to the top deck, followed immediately by the Pekin banker; and I conceived the idea of following them—not out of curiosity, but merely to escape for a moment from this noisy festivity.

On deck there was complete darkness, a terrace of tranquil night above the clamorous hilarity. The inflamed air of the hot day hovered over the waves, seemed to absorb their coolness and then to exhale sighs of contented relief. I breathed deeply, at peace. Not a steamer in sight, not a light-house in the distance, nothing but stars everywhere—in the heavens and in the water. The phosphorescent sea crackled with sparks, and from the prow of the ship spurted fairy spray which fell back in vari-colored drops like star-dust. A gleaming, electrified sea, like a cat's spine . . . One could divine mysterious fluorescence under the waves, luminous gliding forms surging from the ocean depths, and behind the boat a path of foam scintillating like a strange Milky Way.

Promenading softly in the shadow of the moored

life-boats, I heard a rustle quite near me. I stopped in surprise. There were two—a man and a woman—but only the man was visible, a very young chap whom I had never seen. His companion had immediately turned her face to the sea, and to avoid embarrassing her, I walked by quickly without looking.

Hardly had I recovered from my alarm, than arriving at the foot-bridge I fell upon another couple. The woman, leaning back, was repelling the man who was embracing her—without a sound, however, and certainly without much conviction—but having perceived me, she quickly effaced herself behind a funnel. Too late: this time I had recognized the Creole's dress, and her sheepish officer stood rooted in front of me, not knowing what countenance to assume. More annoyed than he was, I turned on my heels, feeling very *de trop* on this deck at this hour—the Bridge of Sighs, as the purser dubbed it—when three men who had been hidden by a smokestack walked up chatting: Jacques Largy, the director, and the basso. I had not expected to find them here. But, happy to meet them, I advanced, holding out my hand.

"I'm glad to see you together," I said pointedly, to emphasize my pleasure.

The director had dropped his usual optimistic expression and the young man looked very pale indeed.

"Before you," he said, "we won't stand on cere-

mony." And taking the director's arm again, he walked on, continuing their discussion.

I followed behind with the basso. Around us, the tarpaulin-covered life-boats slept in their cradles. On the foremast, the signal-light was burning. Mixed with the rumble of the air-turbines came an occasional jazz wail, detached by the breeze. In my memory the words of the two men are forever intermingled with that confused buzzing in a background of tranquil night.

"Why didn't she come?" Jacques was saying.

Beside the tall young man who walked with bowed head, the nervous director gesticulated: "But you know why, my dear fellow: she was afraid."

Jacques stopped. He shrugged his shoulders wearily: "Afraid of me? That's strange . . ." He stood thus in silent absorption for a few minutes, while the director strove hard to convince him.

"She loves only you, you know it perfectly well. You mustn't believe a word of all the slander you've been hearing. It's Prater, I'm sure of it. Tell me, isn't it?" Growing more pressing, he grasped the young man's arm. "Believe me, my boy. To remain here would be folly. The day after tomorrow we arrive in Penang, you must get off at once. If you don't disappear immediately, this time it's finished, you're done for."

Bit by bit, the drama unfolded itself to me. Had I been more daring at that moment, I would have gone up and joined my entreaties to those of the director, I would have supplicated Jacques, but a shyness restrained me. Besides, after a more prolonged silence, the young man seemed to have made up his mind.

"Well, yes," he promised, "you're right. I'll leave."

The basso and myself were so relieved that we hurried up to him. "That's right, old man," said the aphonous singer, shaking his hand.

Thinking that he had guessed what Jacques was hoping for, the director then proposed to find Florence Bernard. "She asked me to, she's waiting for me."

But the young man held him back. "No, let her be." He could not bear the idea of a rendezvous accorded perhaps through pity. Besides, he would never have consented to reappear before us in the arms of Manon, to give the spectacle of the flouted lover forgiving his mistress. He was too proud.

"I hold nothing against her," he said.

These words were enough to arouse the director. "What could you hold against her?" he raged. "The poor dear, she's done nothing for which she could be reproached, I assure you."

The young man did not reply to that, but he smiled incredulously and murmured bitterly: "She couldn't

ever be anything but a fair-weather friend . . .”

We had returned to the rear of the spardeck, near the radio, now silent. The orchestra was silent too.

“It must be late,” said the basso.

Jacques had stopped close to the railing and was gazing at the sky. One could no longer see the constellation of France which the eye was accustomed to place among the familiar stars. The strange night was powdered with unknown nebulae. Every moment shooting stars would fall, streaking the infinite with their flying message.

“Are you making a wish?” I inquired of Jacques, to break the silence.

He did not turn his head. Keeping his glance fixed in the distance, he answered in a half-voice, sweeping the horizon with a weary gesture: “Yes, to fall, like them . . .”

THERE were several of us for whom the hours leading up to our arrival in Penang were sheer anguish. Jacques Largy was perhaps the least nervous. On the last night when he walked with us on the spardeck—not wishing to appear on the promenade-deck any more—it was rather ourselves who looked in need of comfort, so indifferent did he appear. But this attitude did not reassure me; I would have preferred his former resolute air.

"You should have brought Manon to him," I finally told the director. "So that he could leave with no vain regrets."

"But I couldn't get him to listen to me," he objected. "And of course I didn't insist. They would certainly have wept in each others' arms, and never have wanted to separate again. No, no, none of that . . ."

After which he slapped me on the back, assuring me that everything would be all right. For once his optimism had some foundation. The next day we anchored at Penang before eight o'clock, and the English inspectors stamped the passports without even glancing at them. Nobody at the gangway, nobody on the landing: Jacques was free.

He did not get off alone, for Prater accompanied him. "I don't want to leave the boy," he told me in the elevator: and puffing out his cheeks with an important air: "Prater has taken along money."

I was walking behind them on the quay when Jacques turned around to gaze for the last time at the boat which had borne him away from France so full of hope. His restless eyes seemed to be searching for something. Suddenly, they grew fixed. Florence Bernard was at a window watching him; she waved her handkerchief and threw some kisses. The young man did not budge.

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"Aren't you even going to say goodbye to her?" asked the director gently.

Jacques looked at him, his eyes hard. "No," he replied. Then, motioning his head towards the promenade-deck: "And him," he added, "have you noticed him?"

We looked up. Garrot, in a white pith helmet, was strolling with Monsieur Pasquelin, waiting for the ladies.

"What of it?" said the director in all simplicity. "What does that matter? I've told you a hundred times that—"

Jacques stopped him with a gesture, and without another glance at the boat, strode off quickly.

We followed him, a bit flustered, not knowing where we were headed. Arriving at the automobile station, we looked at each other in silent agreement: "Well?" The director, mistrustful, did not wish to leave Jacques alone with Prater, at any price, but the latter relieved him of this fear of his own accord.

"Why don't you make a tour of the island," he suggested. "There are some curiosities. A funicular and a snake temple. Prater will attend to getting the boat for Monsieur Largy by himself." Then, thinking this promise insufficient, he added in a solemn voice. "It is necessary that the boy leave. I'm in agreement."

He left us, after arranging a meeting about noon

at the *E. et O.*, the principal hotel of Georgetown, and relieved, we departed for the excursion. Jacques' heavy silence seemed even more poignant against this gay landscape; there was too cruel a contrast between this tortured face and this Paradise island where one would have liked to live forever with a beloved. His sombre eyes glided over the scene; and each charm induced a regret. I was almost angry with myself for admiring it.

In the different parts of the world, there are doubtless lovely landscapes to be met, but Penang is happiness itself. After Ceylon, you would think it impossible to meet anything more enchanting, but there is Penang—that particle of India planted like a bouquet at the entrance to the Straits of Malacca. A small domain about six miles in circumference, only a short distance from the Malay peninsula. A pleasure port, a miniature capital, with perennial gardens, a population of all the colors ranging from ochre to saffron, toy villages hidden under palm-trees, pagodas where the bonzes offer you their hands in friendly fashion, a panorama from a hill trying to look like a mountain, Malabar carriages, the whole of which could be encompassed in a modern taxi. Chinese trotting along balancing beams on their shoulders from which hang two trays of pamplemousse and mangostan, laughing children, squealing black

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pigs, all this on a delightfully small scale, proportioned so that it could be just covered in the seven-hour landing—like the foot of Hassan which the Creator “had made very small so that it could be made carefully.”

I would have liked to tear Jacques out of his reverie, to amuse him with these rotund Chinamen walking under their oil-paper parasols, carts covered with a rustic bower of palm-leaves and drawn by prehistoric buffaloes, soup-vendors promenading their ambulant kitchens at the two extremities of a beam, the heating-apparatus on one side, the larder on the other—scenes of such unexpected and picturesque drollness that it all looked prearranged—but the very gaiety must have rendered him more bitter. As we followed one of the straight wooded avenues greeted continually by women in rose and blue tunics, he pointed to a clump of cabbage-palms with tufted foliage, a rice-field where little zebus were gamboling, and here and there Malaysian straw-huts raised on piles, and he said to me, without removing his glance:

“Ever since I was a child, I have always dreamed of lands like this, like the fairy islands I used to read about in Bougainville. At last I began to think that they no longer existed. And now you see it is today, just for today, that I must realize my childhood dream.”

He averted his head still further, as if to hide his eyes from me, and added softly, in a tone that cut me to the quick:

“Destiny chooses its hour strangely . . .”

Seated in front of us, on a folding-seat, the director was not paying much attention to the landscape. However, he did notice a grassy hill-side strewn with hundreds of white tombs among the hibiscus and laurel. From their high garden, the tranquil dead can overlook the whole island, the varnished temple roofs, and beyond the woods, the red sails of the Chinese junks putting out to sea. Immediately, the artist in him awoke.

“What a background for *Butterfly*!” he cried in admiration. Then, casting an expert eye over the scene, he corrected a little detail: “Only I’d add a pagoda on top.”

Everything was so gay that it looked like Sunday. This morning the news had spread from one end of Penang to the other that a big steamer was arriving, and the whole island had been set in motion: the coolies with their skinny legs and cropped heads, little children so young that they were not yet in clothes, the rickshaws, Malabar carriages, little carts heaped high with bananas, oranges, bound porkers and squawking ducks.

Yes, it was Sunday, and all the hedges were in

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bloom, all the cottages smiling, all the Indians in necklaces; in the botanic gardens the cascades played and the yellow robes of the bonzes flamed on the terraces. It was Sunday, and bare-footed customers swarmed in Chinese shops from which escaped an odor of brine. Two Malays, wearing their traditional skull-caps of purple velvet, were playing billiards in a large café opening on the street, and the crowd outside bet and shouted, paying no attention to the squatting figure who was counting the points in a sing-song drone. It was Sunday, and all the market-places were overflowing. On the sidewalk a yellow hawker was preparing his sherbets, grating blocks of ice for the pretty native girls who smiled at him. A sort of big-bellied Buddha, lording over his stall, was cutting and weighing his meat with skilful strokes, blind beggars played on their flutes, little children with bronze bodies and bird-like voices ran up to the autos. For our reception, the fortunate isle had added another Sunday to its calendar.

Jacques, however, did not cheer up. At times he would turn around, as if searching for another automobile on the road. We had encountered the Nicolais coming out of a temple, and that was the only time that his melancholy lifted for a moment. Having greeted the young girl he said:

“I’ll miss that child. She was so nice to me.”

Then, sunk in silence again, he followed us. Nothing succeeded in distracting him, neither the beautiful terraced gardens, the faïence portals, the queer roofs with their multi-colored tiles, the mysterious grand temple where sticks of incense burned before a huge gilded Buddha, nor even the basin filled with innumerable turtles with monstrous jaws and century-old wrinkled necks. After that, the only thing left to see was the serpent temple which all the women had talked about and vowed never to visit, though they all went of course.

We met many acquaintances there. The Fat Little Man was photographing his ugly wife on the threshold, and the curio-dealer, inside, stood musing in front of a shrub entwined with sleeping serpents. It was all so surprising that you did not think of being afraid. The snakes were at liberty with no barrier between them and the visitors. They were everywhere: on the branches, on the furniture, under the branches—the old fellows with green and gray scales who remained coiled up in the corners, and the more dangerous young ones with their flat heads and wicked black eyes.

“There’s no danger,” the Fat Little Man assured us. “They’ve extracted all the poison fangs.”

That was doubtlessly true, but nevertheless you advanced gingerly, in horror of suddenly stepping on

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the gliding body of a cobra. The director admitted it without shame:

"This sacred museum disgusts me," he said. "I like the turtles much better."

We were just about to leave when the sound of an automobile stopping made us turn round. We all started: it was Florence Bernard escorted by her three friends. "I knew it," groaned the basso.

Standing outside in the full sunshine, the new arrivals could not see us, and Manon was approaching fearfully, on the arm of the Creole, while Garrot teased her.

"Mademoiselle Bernard is brave, but not rash."

Covertly we watched Jacques: he had not stirred. Manon began to advance more slowly. "I'm awfully scared, I tell you," she said in her sweet voice, turning beseeching eyes on the broker. Was it the sight of him that impelled Jacques forward? As Garrot, to set a brave example, entered first, the young man stepped brusquely towards the entrance, blocking the broker's path. The scene was rapidly played. A bit pale, the Shanghaian stopped short on the threshold. "Pardon!" said the young man dryly. And with a simple movement of his athletic arm he pushed the other back several paces. Manon recognized Jacques and screamed, huddling against the Creole.

"Then it's true that I frighten you," he said in a

hollow voice. "Well, depend upon it, before long you'll really have something to be frightened at."

With this menace launched, he strode rapidly across the street, entered our automobile and gave a curt order to the chauffeur who drove off in the direction of Georgetown, before we could even think of calling him back. Florence was crying. Garrot, still shaky from the sudden attack, picked up his helmet which had fallen to the ground; and as for the rest of us, we knew not what to say.

"He was always so gentle," sobbed Manon.

The broker began to collect himself. "I pity him," he said between his teeth. "He's an unfortunate man. All I can say is, I hope for his own sake that he won't be seen on deck again after tonight."

We immediately informed him that we had an appointment at the *E et O* with Prater.

"You'd better get there quickly. With that toad you can expect anything."

But our machine had left, and we were obliged to accept seats in another automobile which stopped once more in front of the Chinese temple because the Fat Little Man had to photograph it. When we finally arrived at the hotel, Jacques and Prater had already left. We grasped the situation instantly.

"There you are!" cried the basso, after an interval of swearing, "He's put him on board again."

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Hastily we went back to the ship, and there indeed we found the two men seated in the second-class smoking-room. Jacques, still suffering from his encounter, gave us no opportunity to question him.

"I'm not leaving," he announced defiantly. "Monsieur Prater's right, I'll get off at Singapore."

We stood there overwhelmed. "At Singapore!" the basso exploded. "Another two days! You're out of your head, my dear Largy. Why go as far as China, when you're here?"

The director and myself joined in, trying to show him what a mad thing he was doing, but Prater would not permit us to finish.

"It's a crime to want to plant the boy here," he interrupted, panting like a buffalo. "Only false friends, like Garrot, would advise such a stupid move. Where would he go? What would he do? You're only trying to get rid of him, aren't you? No more, thanks," he finished in English.

We still failed to comprehend. All excited, Prater drew out his wallet, a sort of worn-out shapeless bag. It was stuffed to overflowing with dollars and pounds, bills from every mint in the world.

"Everything was arranged for, you see. I'd lend him money. Would his other friends do as much? But Prater, he uses his head. He doesn't put both legs in the same trouser. What would become of the

boy here? *Was soll er machen?* Wait till they come and fetch him, perhaps? He'd be a prisoner on your little island. Reported immediately——"

The director lost patience. "But you know that he was going to take the first boat out!"

"*Niet!* There aren't any boats. Prater inquired. He would have to take a miserable little cargo-boat, and being the only passenger, they'd notice him quickly and think it suspicious. It's much better to stay on this ship which goes faster. Only thirty-six hours to Singapore. That's the sensible thing to do."

We were staggered. Only the stubborn basso kept on heaping insults on Prater, until Jacques had to silence him. One thing was clear: Jacques was not leaving. The director dared not insist any further, fearing that any added urgings would bring Jacques' suspicions down upon himself.

"After all," he calculated, shaking his credulous head, "thirty-six hours is not so long. . . ."

Prater grew more assured. He was still snorting, not entirely recovered from his scare. "I wanted to save the boy, all by myself," he jabbered, arranging his bills.

He looked sincere, and often, later on, I wondered whether he had not really been so.

OFFERING IN THE NIGHT

“**A**ND you were complaining in the Red Sea,” said the doctor mockingly as he watched me lying prostrate in my steamer-chair all day. “Now, at least, you know what heat is. And if you come back in May, you’ll really have something to complain about.”

This time, in truth, it was stifling. The Straits of Malacca is the focal point of the equator. All the heat in the world seems to collect there, to be disseminated later over the earth. The sea is an immense steaming boiler. The tropical humidity exhausts you, empties your head, sets your nerves on edge. The railing burns the hand like a hot iron and the ventilators adjusted to the port-holes find no air against which their blades can beat. A steam room . . .

The officers’ orderlies, the Chinese amahs, and colonial boys can get no sleep in the hold, and in the night you see a line of them stretched out in the

corridors before their masters' doors, like dogs.

"One must be indulgent," said the wife of the Fat Little Man.

Assisted by his impassive temperament and hardened by long years of service, the doctor did not suffer from the sweltering heat. On the contrary, it seemed to lend him added sprightliness. Feeling me incapable of reaction, he began to make fun of my enthusiasm of yesterday.

"So Penang's still a bit of Paradise, is it? Well, give them enough time to install an electric system, street cars, and a few garages, then you'll come back for a visit and be of my opinion. Would you like to cull the fruit of my experience? Here it is: the future belongs to the derby hat! Don't think I'm joking, it's a prophetic truth. Where the most powerful conquerors, where the prophets, the gods themselves have failed, the hat-maker will triumph. Over all the continents he will set up that crown of black felt which makes a Senegambian negro the equal of a Piccadilly swell; and the uniformity which neither the Alexanders, the Tamerlanes, nor the Napoleons with all their legions could obtain, nor the Buddhas, the Mohammeds, the Christs with their Words, will be realized without preaching or bloodshed by this symbolic hat which the modern Chinaman is already receiving by cargo-loads, and which will equalize exactly,

almost to the facial coloring, the hundreds of millions of imbeciles who dishonor the face of the earth."

All the time that he was delivering this harangue, he was looking out of the corner of his eye at the wife of the Fat Little Man who was gossiping near us in the center of her customary group. Naturally, she was talking about Manon.

"Suppose she is pretty," she exclaimed in her magpie's voice. "What of that? You can't make a salad out of beauty."

The doctor wagged his head. "That's true," he agreed, rewarding her with a wry smile, "but to be fair, you must admit that you can't make one out of ugliness either."

At that moment the Shanghaians came up and the Ugly Lady walked away, offended at the thought of being near such people. It was a prudent move: Garrot was in a nasty humor.

"I've had enough of this business!" he cried, caring little about being overheard. "Prater wants to get the better of me, but I'll do it first. I'll ruin myself if necessary, but I'll ruin him too. To begin with, I'm going to give him a good box on the ear. After that we'll see what's what."

Fortunately, his companions were more pacific and tried to calm him. Even the curio-dealer emerged

from his dreamy lethargy to mumble a few words of Taoist advice.

"You must not undertake to run contrary to the course of things," he declaimed, wagging his long mandarin finger with its enormous nail. "Preserve the cold impartiality of heaven. Let water be a model for the wise man: it does not strive to keep its form, it takes on that of any vase . . ."

But an enraged man has never been pacified by citations from Lao-Tse.

"That has nothing to do with it," answered the broker. "He'll get his thrashing anyway."

"And after that?" remarked the Pekin banker. "You won't have gotten very far. It will stir up a fine scandal on board, the young Largy will think that it's all cooked up so as to get rid of him and steal his mistress, and Prater will once more appear as the pitiful victim. No, better keep calm and let me arrange it."

Glad perhaps to have discovered this pretext, our elegant friend went down to the second-class deck where he knew he would find his little friend Musette.

But despite his diplomatic manners and adroit suggestions, his mission failed. Jacques brusquely told him to reserve his solicitude for others, and Prater replied with something undoubtedly insulting, but in a dialect unfortunately incomprehensible.

I understood Jacques' resentment. Day by day, he saw his projects for flight being noised about, and recalling that it was Manon who had first divulged them, he felt a rising tide of rancor. He felt his danger more imminent and regretted not having left at Penang. Anxiously he counted the hours. "The day after tomorrow, we'll be in Singapore" . . . and immediately, though he knew it to be a bad move, he would post himself once more in front of the map where the ship's route was indicated. Then discouragement seized him again, he shrugged his shoulders and stretched out on a steamer-chair, indifferent to everything. "I'd prefer to be caught and have it all over with." During such moments, Prater followed him with pitiful solicitous eyes, as if Jacques were a patient entrusted to his care.

"*Armer Kerl!*" he would sigh.

If I chanced to be passing, he would catch me by the arm, calling me to witness. "Why does Garrot want the boy to disappear? Let him be frank. And this banker, too, what is he mixing in for?" Then, lowering his voice confidentially: "I don't trust him. He's a Jew, you know . . ."

It pained Garrot to meet me in the company of his associate. As soon as possible, he managed to come over, and then it was his turn to try to convince me.

"Just look at me," he said, pulling at one of my coat buttons. "Do I look like a rascal?"

No, he certainly looked as concerned as the rest of us, and I believe that he would have done anything in his power to help Jacques save himself. Besides, it was to his interest to do so.

"You see, I have no illusions," he continued. "I don't expect to take Florence away and make her love me, but I'm attached to the girl. Can you picture her all alone in Indo-China with that bunch of ham actors who detest her? It's impossible. We must get her out of it . . . What can her lover find to reproach me with? If Florence moved into first-class, it's not my fault, it's her own. All he's got to do is not to treat her so rudely."

Hoping to get him to divulge all he knew of the matter, I put on a knowing air: "He should certainly have gotten off at Colombo, it would have been the most prudent thing to do. In any case, he must not be allowed to pass the next landing."

Immediately Garrot scrutinized me searchingly. "It's necessary, is it?" he asked in a low voice. "Why, do you know? He must have done something pretty bad to be obliged to escape so quickly . . ."

We measured each other cautiously, each one supposing that the other knew more than he admitted.

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In truth, nobody at that time knew the real facts about the tragedy except the director and Prater.

"How can we convince him?" continued Garrot. "He must get off at Singapore." And he added between his teeth, always reverting to his original idea: "I believe all the same that a thrashing for Prater would not have been out of place."

It was partly the heat of the Straits which made him so surly; we lived in a boiling bath. On the promenade-deck, the limp women lay motionless, their cheeks bare of rouge, their powder in streaks. You could see the soaked shirts sticking to the men's chests and small rivulets formed wet stripes on the backs of their white coats where they met the chair. Even if you lay inert, you dripped. The perspiration hung in beads on the hands, stung the lips, trickled down from the temples. You felt like wringing yourself out like a wet rag and stretching your tortured limbs clear to the rail. Three times, four times a day, you took a shower, but it was impossible to keep dry; hardly had you dried yourself on one side than the perspiration broke out on the other.

Some of the passengers played feebly at quoits, others took a careful promenade. But at the end of a few minutes, one after the other, they fell back in their chairs, disheartened. The wise old habitués never

left the bar, where all the blinds were drawn and the electric fans going at full speed.

"When you know how to go about it," the doctor informed me, "you can even manage to catch a cold."

The sea was like a lump of lead, very smooth, but treacherous-looking. The heavy sky hung low, in a broken arch. And not at all blue: slate-gray, the color betokening a storm. For the doctor it was a source of elation.

"Well, I certainly described the tropical sky truthfully to you!"

During the siesta in the cabin, you lay naked on the berth, panting. The electric fan cooled only one portion of your body at a time, leaving the rest hot, and the sheets stuck to the skin like gum. At three o'clock you went up on deck again, no more refreshed than before.

Even in the late afternoon, with all the blinds rolled up allowing the air to pass more freely, it was still stifling.

"Is the wind on the portside?"

"No, on the starboard."

The men of the port-watch and starboard-watch envied and execrated each other in turn. Another two weeks of this, and they would be at each other's throats.

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In the evening the steamer-chairs were stretched out facing the sea to catch the bit of breeze. The musty smell of human animals mounted from the open holds, where the colonial soldiers were stationed. We slept on deck, as in the Red Sea. At four o'clock while it was yet dark, a general confusion awoke us. It was the sailors coming to swab the deck, in charge of a quarter-master with a powerful voice. They sang, whistled, and began to juggle the chairs which they were piling up.

"Not so much noise, *godferdom!*" yelled the quartermaster who used a jargon compounded of all languages. "You'll wake everybody up, you idiots!"

The water ran down in cascades as the bare-footed men swabbed the boards with vicious lunges of the mop.

"Go easy there! *Avanti!*"

Despite the uproar, most of the passengers slept on. Then these huskies, suddenly grown soft-fingered, would very gently draw the sleepers' chairs out of the way. Why not? They had tips in mind.

"Hurry up," shouted the quarter-master, already on the lower deck. "Get a move on!"

On the third-class deck the sailors' manners changed. No more tips to expect,—no more consideration.

"Get inside quickly, we're cleaning up!"

And as soon as the hose was turned on, it sounded a loud liquid reveille. Should one be angry at them? Of course not, it was just a matter of nerves. . . . It was nerves also which made Odette's mother more jealous, her husband more arrogant, the Ugly Lady more malicious, and her fat husband more foolish.

"Get human beings to sweat a little, and then judge them," said the doctor, rubbing his hands.

Monsieur Pasquelin redoubled the watch on his Creole, and when a certain midshipman seemed to be prowling too near, you would see him get up, his shoulders hunched and his fists clenched. The young married couple had quarrelled at table over a mere nothing, and the mouse-like Shanghai lawyer, grown suddenly over-bold in his attitude toward the Solitary Lady, had been publicly rebuked by the Pekin banker. The heat . . .

Garrot was not surprised at these events. But he looked at the colonials suspiciously, holding them responsible for the hostility by which he felt himself surrounded.

"Look at them," he brooded. "That former postman, that imbecilic customs officer and that insignificant administrator, do you notice the important air they begin to give themselves as soon as they approach Saigon? In France they don't amount to a row of beans, out in the colonies they're kings. So

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they stick up their noses and puff out their chests like hot-air balloons. If anyone cut the cord, they'd blow away . . . What shams! . . . No, twenty millions wouldn't drag me out there . . .”

The Fat Little Man, for his part, did not hide his opinions. “Those Shanghaians think they can do anything they please because they have money. Between you and me, that was a pretty mean trick he played on Jacques Largy.”

I was no longer listening to them, and, growing irritable myself, was ready to start a quarrel at the least provocation. For one thing, I saw that the real victim of all their quibbling was Florence Bernard. The women passengers cut her dead, and fearing a scene, the poor girl had given up eating with us and took her meals at the first service, with the children, the nurses, and a few house-broken couples who disliked to dress. For the rest of the day, she never appeared on the promenade but remained hidden on the small upper deck which only the nuns frequented.

The Creole kept her company, and sometimes also the blond lieutenant. One evening before they reached Penang, he permitted himself to give Odette a few words of advice, in which he told her that she was compromising herself by spending whole days in second-class with the artistes. But she put him harshly

in his place, and since that time they had not spoken to each other. So, to spite her, he became attentive to Manon. Between these two companions, listening only to their advice, the memory of her lover gradually began to efface itself. At first she merely felt reproachful towards him because he did not try to see her; but, bit by bit, embittered by the existence she was forced to lead, she began to blame him for everything.

"It's all his fault," Madame Pasquelin repeated ceaselessly. "And here you are crying for him! Didn't I tell you he'd never kill himself?"

If the blond lieutenant chanced to join them in the meantime, the Creole would glance at him languidly from between her long black lashes and sigh: "Yes, men are all alike. They can't understand us."

My friend the doctor took no interest whatsoever in these petty intrigues. He was occupied rather with the more general forces, with the "motivating sentiments" as he termed them, and he observed all these people as if they were guinea pigs undergoing an experiment.

"The cause of everything: love," he declaimed in his nasal voice, his long arms knotted behind his back. "Sometimes money also, but they're connected . . . Will you look at that pack of animals looking for opportunities to suffer just because they're in

love? The Pasquelin trembles for fear of being a cuckold, Garrot involves himself in an adventure which will probably ruin him, the abandoned tenor cannot sleep, the blond lieutenant spends his time on the foot-bridge dreaming of the little spit-fire instead of conducting successful affairs, while his rival the engineer broods over his passion at the bottom of a hold 150° in the shade. They're in love, you say? And what do they love?"

"Women, of course."

"Women!" he snorted, planting himself in front of me. "And do you know what a woman is? She's forty kilograms of water, eight of fat, nine of albumin, four of lime, three of mineral matter, and not forgetting seven hundred and twenty grams of sugar and twelve of iron. There she is exactly, and I defy anyone to make anything else out of her. Call her what you wish, Messalina, Cleopatra, Agnes Sorel, Elvire, or even Florence Bernard, if she weighs about 125 pounds, this analysis will assay her within a half pound. Nature stretches a new skin over this pretty mélange, taking care to make no creases, and it's for such a thing that a man smiles, weeps, sings, ruins and kills himself! . . . And notice, it's not unnatural for a man to be in love and ignore the loved one's physiology, but what passes my under-

standing is that there's never yet been a poor cuckold who had the courage to say to himself, for consolation, that after all what stood before him was nothing but a large pail of tepid water, a bladder full of fat, a jar of white-of-egg, some raw sugar, and not enough iron to make a handful of nails."

At that moment I was hardly in a mood to discuss this perverse point of view; it was really too hot. And besides, I knew that this was not the sort of climate in which to attempt to humanize this misanthrope and improve his judgment. Everything he saw served to irritate him, and unmindful of his own bad humor, he incessantly made fun of other peoples' testiness.

"You'll see that they'll come to blows," he told me, already cheered up at the prospect.

His prophecy almost came true. Late afternoon of the next day we saw a stream of smoke and then the smokestack of a large steamer. By its color we recognized it as a *Blue Funnel*. Garrot, seized with a sudden suspicion, immediately went up to the radio-room and sent a message to the English boat, asking them if they had called at Penang. The answer came back, "yes." The broker descended from the spardeck, his face livid.

"You see," he burst out, having drawn us aside,

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"now will you believe me when I tell you that Prater is capable of anything. He lied: Largy could have taken the boat at Penang . . ."

The news threw us into consternation.

"The dog!" raged the director.

"And it's not over yet," continued Garrot. "Now that he's got the poor boy in his trap, he'll keep him there."

This time the director raised his head. "I guarantee that he won't," he stated in such a decisive voice that we hardly recognized him.

When the final dinner-gong sounded, he left us. But he did not go down to his cabin to dress. Knowing that Prater spent most of his days in second—not so much to be near Jacques as to be out of the broker's way—he went to wait for him at the end of a corridor. Spying Prater, he took him firmly by the arm and dragged him over to a corner where they were hidden by a windlass. Then, grasping the frightened man's collar, he said in an undertone:

"Monsieur Prater, you're a blackguard!"

The stupefied man opened his mouth like a congeel out of water, and his cheeks began to quiver like gills.

"Why so?" he stuttered in English, unable to think of a reason for this brusque attack.

The director jerked his head in the direction of the

approaching *Blue Funnel*. "She called at Penang, and you knew it . . ."

In his panic, Prater's tongue suddenly grew entangled, and mixing up all the languages he knew, he tried to explain himself. The director cut him short.

"*Halt's Maul!*" he exclaimed roughly, to show that he too spoke German. "Just listen to me . . . You've got your claws on my poor tenor and you hope to drag him down to his destruction so that—"

"But I want to help the boy!"

"Shut up! I'm speaking. You may be doing it only to get your Shanghai partner into a dirty fix—that's quite possible. But I don't care what your reason is, the result is the same. So I forbid you—listen to me carefully, Prater—I fo-r-bid you to see Jacques Largy."

"My word," the other interrupted again in English. "I only wanted to help him—"

"I prefer that you don't . . . I want to save the boy myself, do you understand me? Did you ever notice the scar on his chin? No, you never did, did you? Well, it's on account of that scar that I'm attached to him . . . I'm furious at myself, you understand, at not having taken him off by force at Colombo. I missed out on my duty. But now I've made up my mind thoroughly, and if today or to-

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morrow you commit the indiscretion of speaking to him, if you ever try to do anything to hurt him, I swear that as sure as we two are standing here—an honest man and a rascal—I will take you by the scruff of the neck, lift you over the rail, and dump you in the ocean. Is that clear?”

As he spoke, he kept getting more and more excited, and shook Prater so roughly that the latter trembled on his crooked legs, not daring to make a movement to escape. At last the director released his hold and Prater precipitously recoiled several paces. Coming back to the corridor, he turned around to gaze at his adversary with terrified eyes. Then seeing a passenger approach, he regained confidence and, with a little wave of his hand, said in a natural voice:

“*Gute Nacht*, dear friend. It’s understood . . . Now I’m going to sleep.”

For the rest of the night he was nowhere to be seen.

ODETTE was watching the Malay coast draw near when the Solitary Lady came up to her.

“Admiring the scenery?”

The young girl started. “No, I was thinking . . .”

For a moment they stood leaning against the rail, silent, their eyes fixed in the distance. In the moun-

tain hollows the clouds floated so low that they looked like large white lakes.

"How lovely everything's been since Ceylon," sighed the Solitary Lady. "For me, the real enchantment didn't begin until then. The earlier ports were so ugly—Port Saïd, Djibouti . . ."

Odette had resumed her distant expression. "No," she said, "I like them . . ." She stood motionless, resting her chin in her hands. All about them the deck was deserted, for the last dinner-gong had sounded. The calm seemed to have settled down over the vast stretch of water on which the twilight mist was falling.

"How quickly this trip's flown by," continued the Solitary Lady. "Tomorrow we'll be in Singapore . . . I wonder if many people will be getting off?"

Odette barely repressed a start, and turned to glance covertly at her companion. But the latter preserved a serene expression.

A few minutes went by, the ocean grew dark, and stars began to pierce the still light sky. The Solitary Lady suggested:

"Let's go down to dinner. We'll be the last ones again."

The little colonial shook her head. "No, I'm not going down. It's too hot."

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Over the bare shoulder of her lovely friend she watched the director pacing up and down, as if to indicate that he was waiting for her. Perhaps the Solitary Lady understood.

"Well, I'll leave you, my dear Odette. Goodbye, I'll see you soon."

"Goodbye, Madame . . ."

When the director left Odette he was astounded by her air of quiet self-control. The girl had listened to him with almost no interruption, occasionally biting her nails or jerking back a lock of hair, and after he had told her all—at least all that he could divulge without really betraying Jacques' secret—she had simply answered composedly:

"Very well, Monsieur. I assure you that he will get off tomorrow."

And without another word she had walked off quickly, no longer able to conquer the nervous chattering of her teeth. Lying down on her couch, she fell into a sort of swoon, whether of fear or joy she herself could not tell. Gradually, she collected herself, and when her mother returned from the dining-room, there seemed nothing amiss. Soon they heard the musicians strike up the first tango, drawing all the dancers to the forward deck.

"Aren't you coming, dear?" asked her mother.

"No, I'm too tired."

As the moment she was waiting for arrived, her anxious heart began to thump. But she controlled her voice:

"I'll take a little walk and then I'm going to bed," she said as she slipped out. "Good-night, Mama."

She went straight to the life-boat deck. Apparently she was very calm, but she never even noticed the greeting of the little engineer. Coming to the spardeck, she stopped short, wavering: in the shadow she had recognized the silhouette of Jacques, taking his customary promenade with the basso. The young man walked up to her in surprise.

"What brings you here?" he inquired with gracious solicitude.

She gazed at him, very pale. "I wanted to see you."

Discreetly, the other singer had already walked away. Jacques understood at once. In spite of himself his face hardened.

"Well, what do you want of me?" he asked curtly, to hide his emotion.

Odette had to stiffen herself. The confession escaped her lips in a sigh: "To save you, Jacques."

It was the first time she had ever addressed him thus, and even at that moment the young man was struck by it. He stared at her fixedly: there seemed nothing alive in her face now but two anguished

eyes. She looked so white that, thinking she was about to faint, he made a motion to support her. But she conquered her weakness.

"Did you see the English boat tonight?" she continued in a clipped voice. "It comes from Penang . . . You were tricked."

He replied only by a nod of his head. Yes, he understood. His tall body hunched over and his hands trembled on the rail. For a moment he remained thus, then said quietly:

"Well, everyone must know the story now; it's the talk of the boat, I suppose."

It was the bitter tone, more than the words, which upset Odette. Coming closer to him, she placed her clasped hands on his broad chest.

"No, you mustn't think that! Nobody knows anything as yet. It was the director who just told me the real story. The others know only about your break with that woman. They put the blame on her."

He shrugged his shoulders to express his indifference. What did he care about people's opinions? However, after a silence, he asked in visible embarrassment:

"And she? Have you spoken with her since—"

"Never. I don't greet her any more."

Jacques was silent again. Another question burned on his tongue, but he was ashamed to pose it to so

young a girl. However, he could believe what she said . . . The desire to know mastered him.

"As far as you are aware," he asked, lowering his voice still further, "has she become his mistress?"

The girl shivered. Then he still loved her . . . Her own dream suddenly crumpled up. The hateful image of Manon appeared, and tears choked her throat. Feebly, she articulated:

"No, Jacques. I don't think so."

Had it not been so pitch dark, he would perhaps have noticed her agonized expression, the trembling chin, and the bloodless lips which could not lie. But he stood with downcast eyes, his spirit far away. "He's thinking of her," thought Odette. No . . . Quickly shaking off the oppressive thought, he looked closely at the young girl and said calmly:

"I don't love her any more. I'm certain that I never shall love her again . . . Nevertheless, it was because of her that I refused to escape, it's on her account that I've killed my chances. In my hope of some unknown revenge, I used up all my courage. Now it's too late. It's over, you see, I can't do anything more, I'll give myself up . . ."

He bowed his head, letting his arms hang limp. Feverishly, Odette threw herself against him.

"I implore you, don't talk like that! Now is the time to be strong. Tomorrow we'll be in Singapore,

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you must get off. That's why I came, to beg you to——"

The tall young man interrupted her with a gesture of nervous indifference. "Oh, tomorrow!"

But the imperious girl would not desist. "Yes, you must have confidence," she went on. "Your director has arranged everything. We arrive very early in the morning, and the *Blue Funnel* doesn't leave until noon, allowing you plenty of time to get on board. With your Russian passport, it will be impossible to recover your traces. So you have no excuse for refusing to leave. Pull yourself together, Jacques. Only one hour of will-power and you're saved."

Once again he shook his head. "What's the use . . ."

Odette importunately took one of his icy hands in her own burning ones. "Your life depends on it, Jacques. You're not going to sacrifice everything out of weakness and discouragement."

"No, just disgust."

She stamped her foot in rage. "But you must forget your ruined past! It's only the future that counts. Remember what you told me at Djibouti, about that free life in the open which you dreamed about——"

"Alone?" he queried, his head drooping.

He moved his arm nearer to her, and her nervous little hands tightened on it. She could say no more. With all her tense will and passionate glance, she

seemed to offer herself, to cry to him: "But I'm here! Don't you understand?" But she dared not.

"If you wanted to . . ." she breathed simply.

And she immediately effaced herself in shame against the young man's shoulder. She felt all her strength ebbing away. Jacques bit his lip. Supporting her yielding body on his arm, he gently raised up the averted head and gazed into the large dilated eyes, with their quivering eyelids.

"Do you know why I must escape?" he asked dully. "No . . . They wouldn't have dared to tell you the abominable reason. If they did, you wouldn't be here. Well, you must know it—"

At these words, the girl freed herself brusquely and her body grew taut as a bowstring. "No, be quiet!" she ordered.

Calming down almost instantly, she regained her place against the broad shoulder and said softly: "I don't want to know now . . . You'll tell me later."

He held her against him, pressing the slight body almost mechanically, and so great was his surprise that he never even wondered if he were happy. He felt as if he were arising, still stunned, from the ruins of his tragic adventure. There was an impression of awakening, of coming to himself.

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"But, Odette," he whispered, bending over the pale face. "You're indulging in a childish dream. It's madness . . . Think how impossible it is."

She shook her head gently, and inevitably, her lips advanced slowly towards his.

"No, Jacques everything one wants is possible . . . I want to save you. And I'll join you as soon as you call, no matter where you may be."

Her promise suddenly unlocked a memory in Jacques' mind. Again he saw the narrow cabin, the blue satin robe, and Manon in her powdered wig. She too had uttered those very words . . . It seemed as if a raw wound had been opened. For a moment, he was silent.

"Jacques," groaned the girl, awkwardly offering her mouth.

"My dear child," he choked. But he merely pressed his cheek to hers.

He was remembering. . . She was hoping . . . Odette felt his heart thumping wildly against hers.

"I want him to love me," she longed desperately. How she wanted to be a woman! "I am yours, Jacques, all yours," she whispered.

Eyes dilated, he was still musing. The moon traced a long, trembling shaft on the water. Then for a moment it hid behind a cloud, so that one could see only two spots of light, like a pair of eyes behind a black

mask. It reappeared in an aureole of prismatic colors and thousands of golden butterflies began to dance on the water.

"Promise me you'll get off tomorrow," the girl entreated, awkwardly tightening her embrace. "Swear it . . . By whatever you hold most dear . . ."

Once more he beheld Manon, with her candid eyes and astonished look. He seemed to hear her say: "Swear by you and me . . ." How many times they had repeated that oath. A convulsive movement twisted his mouth to one side, and he felt two tears well up under his eyelids.

The radio which had been silent for a while suddenly began to click again—like a grasshopper waking up. Jacques shuddered. With beating heart, he listened to the mysterious clicking, counting the sparks, measuring the intervals. Never had this magic language frightened him so much. He gazed in fascination at the little wireless-cabin, anxiously straining his ear. What is it talking about? Me?

Each new crackling seemed to pierce him with its invisible dart. The eternal conversation made him feel sick. As it continued, his hands turned to ice and his legs grew weak.

"Swear it . . ." begged the tender voice. Making a supreme effort, he controlled himself. And as the two tears rolled down he promised her softly:

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"I swear it, my dear child. By my mother . . . By yourself . . ."

OUR arrival in Singapore was marked by dreadful weather. The sky had grown overcast and as we entered the channel the storm broke suddenly—the brutal tropical storm which bursts in a second, the water coming down in sheets, like bricks. Through the thick screen of rain and warm vapor I saw the port appear, but instead of dissipating my inquietude, it turned it to anguish. Hardly had the pilot climbed on board than I stood waiting impatiently at the gangway, anxious to see ourselves ashore. I searched in vain for the director; no one had remarked him.

"Will the passports take a long time?" I asked the doctor who was pacing stiffly up and down, jerking his head like a chicken.

"No passports here!" he informed me. "It's a free port." Then he called my attention to a small island in the channel arranged like a fortress, with dungeons and concrete canon-ascents, and added: "Nevertheless, they maintain those . . ."

An absurd panorama spread out: sheet-metal hangars, the jungle, bungalows with clumps of mauve flowers, a swamp, green lawns, a factory, and close to a hydroplane station a Malaysian village where

hundreds of pile-huts had sprung up in the mud. It seemed as if civilization had not had time enough to install itself. It camped here and there, but all about, the old country had not changed.

"What I'd like to know is, just what is Singapore?" asked a young lady.

"The capital of the Straits Settlement," replied a well-informed colonial.

The lady uttered a wonder-struck "Oh," but dared not ask what that might be.

I looked at everything but could not succeed in becoming interested. Leaning over the rail, I scanned the curious groups on the quay, trying to see if I could, from such a distance, distinguish a suspicious-looking silhouette in the midst of the white-clad men. "How I wish I were one hour older," I confessed to the doctor who was going down to receive the officials of the Health Department. I was so agitated that I didn't wait for the boat to dock before posting myself at the gangway. I watched the ship's officers closely, the slightest little movement of the crew did not escape me; but everything proceeded as usual. Crowds of passengers began to fill the deck, planning excursions and exchanging hotel addresses. As for me, I stood there counting the seconds and kept turning around every moment to see if Jacques were coming.

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At last the purser arrived and there was an immediate rush for the gang-plank. The rain had just stopped and the debarkation in the full sunlight was as merry as a boarding-school picnic. There was a general movement of opening up parasols and adjusting smoked glasses. Just then I saw Jacques Largy approaching the director. He seemed at ease. Undoubtedly he had told himself that now he was running no risk. He walked calmly ahead, stepped aside to let a woman pass, and then stopped in front of the board where the departure notice was posted.

At that moment the purser, who had been standing near the exit, approached discreetly and placed his hand on Jacques' shoulder. I understood at once, and it shocked me so rudely that I had to lean against the elevator cage for support. No one had noticed anything as yet, except the director who stood beside me, his face livid. The purser murmured a few words into the ear of the young man who had his back turned to us, and I saw Jacques make a brusque movement and draw his whole body taut. Not stopping to think, I rushed over.

Useless. . . . Before him the young man suddenly perceived the stolid figures of two colonial soldiers with chin-straps. No more was necessary. The purser, as pale as ourselves, kept on speaking in a low voice, gently pushing him the while, and finally

Jacques gave in. He did not even turn to look back at us, but stunned—like a sleep walker—let himself be led down the third-class corridors, the two soldiers following behind. The door clicked. It was over. . .

The whole affair had transpired so quickly that the passengers had had no time to grasp the situation. They all talked at once, and questioned each other in high excitement. Those who came running back from the gang-plank mingled with those who were coming up the stairs, and soon nothing could be distinguished in the confusing hub-bub.

“What’s happened?” the late comers asked the others.

They began to bang against the door with their feet and the poor cornered chief-steward knew not whom to answer. At last the Fat Little Man disentangled himself from the crowd. Camera in hand, he rushed past me like a whirlwind, on his way to the cabins.

“Werther is arrested!” he bawled. “Werther is arrested!”

And that is how Manon learned the news.

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TOWARDS evening, tired out after making a dozen trips from the boat to the hotel and a whirlwind tour of Singapore, I returned to the Raffles Hotel where the Shanghaians awaited me. I had no news for them. Kept under close surveillance by the marines, Jacques Largy had communicated with no one. The instructions received by radio were simple: To obviate the formalities of extradition he was to be put ashore at Saigon. There he would be heard by the examining magistrate before being brought to France for final trial.

"All of which promises a beautiful end to the voyage," grumbled the broker.

Now that the mystery was revealed, everybody claimed to have foreseen it.

The Pekin banker, for example: "I wasn't fooled, not for an instant. I felt something suspicious from the very beginning. Didn't you ever notice his taci-

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turn expression, those sudden fits of moodiness? And another thing—I always distrusted his flair for adventure and that air of bravado.”

“Much too brave to be honest, in fact,” agreed Monsieur Pasquelin.

The curio-dealer emerged from his reverie: “This war generation. . . .”

It was Garrot who evinced the most clemency. “If I had had any idea that the affair was so serious,” he said, regretfully, “I would have come to an understanding with him at Penang. He could have slipped aboard the *Blue Funnel*—and with that false passport he had it would have been the devil’s own job to trace him. He would have been out of danger by now, and Manon, at least, would not be in the state she’s in at present.”

The banker, even taking into account Garrot’s relationship to Manon, was profoundly shocked at this clemency.

“You seem to be forgetting that he murdered his uncle,” he said, pursing his lips severely.

But the broker took the murder with perfect nonchalance. “His uncle? A rascally old miser; Florence told me so a dozen times. To tell the truth, I don’t give a damn about his uncle.”

None of us could understand how, in three weeks’ time, the courts could have established Largy’s guilt.

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The warrant gave no information. But Jacques, instead of making any denial, had at once made a clean breast of it before the purser, adding, however, that he regretted nothing. He recounted how with one mad gesture he had seized a nearby poker and struck blindly at the old man, who had fallen under the first blow.

"A very lovely death, essentially," said Garrot, in the same tone of detachment.

When the Creole broke the full news to Florence, a terrible scene ensued. She almost went mad, screamed, sobbed, implored mercy for her lover, shrieked "It can't be true!" Then, suddenly beginning to tremble for her own skin, she swore that she knew nothing, nothing whatever, and begged all of us to defend her. In the midst of her sobs she would cry out again and again that she must see him; then she would call upon the captain to help her. "He won't refuse me. . . . He will understand how I'm suffering. . . ." As her cabin door had been left ajar, the entire performance was witnessed by the curious and indiscreet, grouped in the passageway. The whole boat filed by to watch her weeping. Finally, by dint of earnest entreaties, she was persuaded to leave her berth and accompany her friends to the hotel. Once there, she at once locked herself up in her room.

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Madame Pasquelin was the only one she could endure near her.

With Manon gone, the main attraction vanished and the curious passengers decided to go ashore, giving me a chance to try to communicate with Jacques. The attempt was a failure. He was shut under close guard in one of the forward cabins near the infirmary. Disappointed, I was about to leave the boat when on the gangway I ran into Mlle. Nicolai talking vehemently to the blond lieutenant. Nearby stood his friend, the engineer, looking more awkward and embarrassed than ever. There was no way of avoiding them.

"You knew all about it," the girl was saying rudely, her belligerent little chin stuck out. "It was you that got the radio message last night. But of course you wouldn't breathe a word of it to anyone! You were only too glad, I suppose."

"But, Mademoiselle," the lieutenant defended himself, his face white, "it was a secret message. I am an officer—"

"Be quiet! Don't bring up such silly excuses. You engineered the whole affair because you're jealous!"

"That's a lie!"

Despite all my efforts, I found myself drawn into the scene. I stopped, taken aback at the spectacle of

the little colonial, her nostrils drawn in with rage, defying the young lieutenant.

"If you had been a decent sort of enemy, you would have warned him!"

"I had no right—"

"No, instead you preferred to turn over and go to sleep, dreaming of tomorrow's sweet revenge."

"I was merely doing my duty."

"Duty never compels anyone to act the sneak and the spy."

This time the lieutenant could hardly help betraying his indignation. He seemed to lunge forward, then he suddenly controlled himself and stood looking down at the young girl, his face white, biting his clenched fists. An insult struggled for utterance in his throat; and he turned fiercely upon his former comrade.

"I suppose you're on her side, aren't you?"

The other drew himself into a defensive attitude. Abruptly, I thrust myself between them.

"Do you call yourselves naval officers?" I cried. "Losing your tempers this way!"

Fortunately, there was no one near except some native porters bustling in and out, and in the confusion the noise of the altercation was completely lost. The blond lieutenant hesitated for a moment, then rushed up the stairway, four steps at a time.

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Odette, now joined by her Annamite boy, left the boat for the quay, where she disappeared from sight.

After this, I was hardly in the mood for an excursion. Nevertheless I did not care to waste my day dancing at Raffles' where the Shanghaiaans had taken up their abode. Bidding defiance to the threatening storm I started off without a guide to explore Singapore. Quite at random I visited the Buddhist temple, the old port, and the native quarter; bought a number of useless knick-knacks in shops to which I was attracted, not so much by the merchandise, as by the mysterious Chinese signs; and no matter what devious route I took, invariably wound up at the boat or the hotel, in the hope of further news.

None of the local attractions could dissipate my anxiety. I went by auto to the Reservoirs (a banal showplace to which tourists are shepherded by carloads) and all the while I could think of nothing but Jacques' arrest. At the Botanical Garden, where we were caught by a sudden shower, the other passengers, who like myself had taken shelter in a greenhouse, were occupied with the same theme. It was clearly of no use to try to thrust the drama from one's mind. I therefore consigned to the lowest depths of hell the over-zealous chauffeur who absolutely insisted on driving me to the museum, and, furious at my wasted day, returned to the hotel.

Engulfed in an arm-chair, I regarded the vast brilliant hall where the first few couples had already taken the floor. I was in Singapore, I, who had had so many illusions about the far-off port. I recollected my first childish dreams in which chimerical voyages transported me to the ends of the world. In my travels Singapore was always recurrent; Singapore, the mystic sonority of whose name hypnotized me. My visions were full of dense forests, Dutch tax-collectors with whips stuck through their belts, exotic birds, blue and gold temples rich with terrifying idols, crenelated walls, elephants and a myriad of junks swaying in the harbor. Today the reality has maliciously effaced the mirage and I know that my whole life long, whenever I think of Singapore my mind will call up the picture of that idiotic pilot walking up the gang-plank wearing a black overcoat—an overcoat, one degree from the equator! I will see North Bridge Road with its spider-web of trolley cars, the old port smelling of fever, a certain wet, dripping garden, loud with the incessant croaking of a bull-frog. Above all, I will see Raffles', its orchestra, cocktails, and Englishmen in dinner jackets, its polished dance-floor, and the table decorated with orchids where white-robed Chinese served us with curry.

"One degree from the Equator!" I repeated moodily, picking at the little saucers filled with mango

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peel, grated cocoanut, gold-fish from the Straits of Macassar, all the unnamed and unnamable dainties one adds to one's rice and gulps down as if they were the flames of Hell. "One degree from the Equator"—and the women asking for their scarves because it's so cool under the ventilators! How far from my dreams!

At the dinner table Manon was the sole subject of conversation. She had not left her room for even a moment and Garrot was beginning to look uneasy.

"Yes, a beautiful way to end the voyage," he repeated, his face bent over his plate.

He had suggested to Florence Bernard that he stop off here with her and wait for the next boat. She had refused. Perhaps she had a vague sense of having contributed to her lover's plight and, gripped by sudden remorse, refused to abandon him. "I want to see him," she wailed stubbornly. Everything seemed to point to a painful evening return to the boat.

Under pretext of showing me the Chinese quarter, the curio-dealer and the banker marched me off with them as soon as dinner was ended. The streets were deserted; our rickshaw-men trotted out, almost elbow to elbow. Nearing the crossings, they would slow down and cry: "Man—man!" Then, the street clear, they bawled "Chop—chop!" (quick) and amid the patter of bare feet, the feather-weight carriages sped

on. The streets began to grow more crowded, more brilliantly lit up; now they were swarming with people; ambulant merchants passed by, striking their hollow bamboo sticks to attract customers, displaying their baskets of strange confections—strings of sausages and candied ducks; half-naked coolies were squatting on benches, eating with chopsticks; groups of almond-eyed girls, all dressed identically in black pantaloons: I was entering China. In Chinatown, you live in the street. There is no such thing as day or night: You sleep when you feel like it, you eat when you can. Hundreds of tables cluttered up the squares, the side-walks, the roadways and under the acetylene lamps the scene resembled a nocturnal tea-garden. But the tea-garden was devoid of life, the music had no gaiety in it, the voices were barren of laughter.

Descending from my rickshaw, I looked curiously at the little bowls in which the portions were all cut up ready to eat. As the Chinese do not use knives, the meat is served in small bits and fragments.

“It’s pork,” the banker informed me.

“No, it’s fish,” the other corrected him.

Farther on, some emaciated coolies with long teeth were huddled about an open-air puppet show.

“Malaysian marionettes,” said the instructive curio-dealer.

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"I beg your pardon—Javanese," came the immediate correction from the banker.

Not once did they manage to agree on a single thing. We passed a lighted dwelling where some Chinese were squatting, bent over with their chins touching their knees, listening to an orchestra playing in the interior. We stopped, and the debate which ensued was the most acrimonious of all, one of them claiming that it was a wedding, the other insisting that it was a funeral.

"Pardon me, my dear friend, but if it were a funeral the veils would be green . . ."

"Then how about the two lanterns?"

I was indifferent to all their arguments; what had gripped me was the ecstasy of these emaciated coolies, sunk in a dream along the sidewalk, absorbed in their native music. Our rickshaws started again; rocked in my wicker chair, I hummed to myself—sounding like a yowling cat,—that cruel music in which nasal flute tones mingled with the clash of cymbals and the irritating screech of violins. All by myself I had just discovered China, while passing a strange house where a wedding was being celebrated. Or was it a funeral?

WHEN we boarded the boat it was quite late; but the deck was still crowded with passengers.

"Anything new?"

"No, not a thing."

There was no need for me to ask more questions nor for them to make further response: We understood each other. The old American was the only one who appeared immune to our preoccupation. In pajamas, with the air of a somnambulist, he paced the deck, his gaze fixed, his arms extended; he was on a mosquito-hunt. Every once in a while he would catch sight of one and clap his hands together noisily. A madman applauding the moon.

GARROT was not mistaken in predicting a sad ending to the voyage. It seemed to us that we were travelling under a half-mast ensign. The boat was still; no jazz in the evening, no concert in the afternoon. As a matter of fact, the musicians had not returned and those who wished to dance were compelled to use the piano.

"After all, it's no occasion for national mourning," said Odette's step-father in exasperation,—when the young girl was not present.

We no longer even attempted to amuse ourselves but passed the time in talking. The effect of the ceaseless chatter was that the passengers built up a sort of detective novel, so complete in all its details that it was a wonder the wife of the Fat Little Man

did not end up by looking for the detective in our midst. She got great satisfaction out of describing the murder and repeating Largy's confession; and, if you urged her slightly, she would tell you in a significant whisper that Manon was not going to get out of it easily, and that we would have a surprise when we reached Saigon.

"What a poisonous creature!" said the director, whenever he noticed her horse-face, surrounded by a circle of attentive listeners.

He had more serious things in view; he was stalking Prater. "Just a little private word with him," he confided to me, with a wink. But the cautious Prater remained invisible. You could take up your position in his passageway for hours and never catch sight of him. We were puzzled to know where and when he ate.

"Do you remember his bet that Jacques would be on board to the very end of the voyage?" said the banker. "He seems to have won it all right, the rascal!"

"That bet of his will cost him dear," raged the broker. "I'll shake him off even if it means my ruin!"

He would never forgive his associate for having broken up his idyll; in truth, it was but a pitiful conquest he had made in poor Manon whom he was going to take to Shanghai. We caught but a glimpse

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of her in the evening on the promenade-deck, leaning on the arm of the Creole. All during the rest of the day she remained on the small upper deck where I occasionally encountered her with an open book on her knees. She never turned the pages.

"Poor little thing," said Monsieur Pasquelin. "It's lucky for her she met Garrot."

The mere phrase made my heart contract. My thoughts wandered to the forward deck where Jacques lay in torture, his face glued to the port-hole. Not my thoughts alone but those of all of us were with him. Though invisible, Werther's presence pervaded the ship, as once his song had done. The doctor who visited him every morning and evening kept me informed regularly.

"He doesn't say a word," he reported. "The only thing he asked for was to see a Spanish priest who was with him in second-class."

I could not bring myself to picture the handsome young fellow walking down the gang-plank with his hands manacled. The very idea tormented me. But as soon as my emotion evinced itself too plainly, the doctor would throw off his momentary soft-heartedness and reassume his morose air.

"Bah! While there's death, there's hope." But his bitterness was forced.

The director, however, did not share my despond-

ency. His confidence amounted almost to lunacy. He kept insisting that Jacques would get off scot-free and was already entertaining himself with rosy visions of marvellous engagements for his tenor, thanks to the lurid publicity the papers would give him.

At last I ceased to speak to anyone about him. What I most earnestly desired was to see him, to try to afford him the comfort of a handclasp or even a passing glance, but he refused to leave his cabin, unwilling to expose himself, flanked by the two guards, to the stares of the curious. My frequent visits to the forward deck were vain; but I often encountered Mlle. Nicolai, at whom the marines stared boldly. She retained her wilful expression, her black brows straight and truculent, her eyes perhaps a bit more deeply circled. I did not ask her the reason for her visits, nor did she ever speak to me.

Two interminable days dragged by. One more night aboard and we would reach Saigon. From hour to hour my anxiety increased. I could not get out of my head the vision of the debarkation: Jacques, his head sunk on his breast, passing between two rows of curious eyes, spying heads at every port-hole, Manon weeping, the opera company crying "Best of luck" . . . I had recourse to the director to dispel my gloomy imaginings.

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"The young fellow has nerve," he insisted. "He won't flinch, wait and see. He's been through things before . . ."

A cheerful philosophy—but, try as I would, I could not share it.

The last afternoon was drawing to a gloomy close. The heavens were already turning violet; evening was coming on. Idly the passengers sauntered up and down, listening for the sound of the dinner-gong, conversing in subdued tones. The third-class deck which usually grew lively with the approach of evening was now quite silent. The whole boat seemed to be in a meditative trance.

Suddenly cries arose on the forward deck. A sharp, abrupt clamor broke out, swelled, reached our deck. People ran past, helter-skelter.

"An accident!" someone shouted.

"Man overboard!" yelled the deckman, running forward.

Stunned, the director and I were thrown against the rail. A bell rang, some people rushed by us; I leaned over, rigid with terror, and about sixty feet below I made out a human figure struggling in the water, the head bobbing on the surface. The ship was moving so quickly that its wake seemed to be carrying the man away like a torrent. A presentiment seized me: Jacques! Gripping the rail breathlessly, I watched

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the body move further and further off. Sailors were running back and forth, shouting orders. The alarm bell clanged incessantly.

"Look! Someone's just dived!" shouted the Fat Little Man.

"Yes—it's an officer!"

The rescuer had dived just as the boat's stern swept past the body. I caught a lightning glimpse of him, a white arrow, a swirl in the water, then I could make out no more. The shouts redoubled. A few passengers, nervous and trembling, came running out of the bar. "What's the matter?" Suddenly a ring of light appeared on the dark wake of the ship; they had just thrown the luminous life-buoy. "Man overboard!" yelled the sailors, rushing like a whirlwind towards the stairway of the spardeck, followed by a red-faced second-mate, hurriedly buttoning his jacket, shouting "Boat Number Four!"

The entire incident had taken but a few seconds.

Miraculously, from no one knew where, the cry had sprung up: "It's Jacques Largy!"

The name was seized upon and passed from mouth to mouth: "It's Jacques Largy . . . It's Werther . . ." Back came another bit of information: "It's the blond lieutenant who dove in after him!" The alarm, the cries, the spot of illumination on the water, the clang of the bell—all formed but a single

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and instantaneous tragic moment. There was no time to think, to gasp with astonishment, to tremble with fear; the mind could do no more than register the impression.

"Look, he's swimming," screamed a woman, pointing. The binoculars followed the direction indicated. The lieutenant had just appeared in the ship's wake. Buffeted by the waves, he advanced with difficulty. Farther away, near the life-buoy, another form would emerge for a moment and then be swallowed up by a large wave.

"Can Largy swim?" asked someone, anxiously.

An unknown voice, replied, "No."

The ship reduced its speed, then, ponderously, began to turn. Anxious as we were, every movement seemed agonizingly slow. But there was no undue agitation, there were no cries; nothing but two hundred silent figures, pressed tight against the rail, straining forward tensely.

"They're out of sight now," said a woman's trembling voice.

"No, there they are, behind the life-buoy."

As we turned, the illuminated buoy seemed to float away, like a wanton marine will-o'-the-wisp. A few seconds passed; then the life-boat dropped from above along the port side of the boat. The six rowers were seated in position, the second-mate was stand-

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ing up. Slowly the ropes paid out. "They'll be too late," murmured the same weak feminine voice. A whistle shrilled: They had reached water level. Another: they were off. Everyone was calculating the distance from the ship to the lighted buoy. "Will they make it?"

At that moment a crowd of marines in their shirt-sleeves surged out of third-class. Breathlessly, they told us the story. Jacques, after going before the purser, was on his way back to his cabin, guarded by the two soldiers. Suddenly he had shoved one of them aside, cleared the rail, and leaped into space, without uttering a word.

"Yes, he did," corrected one of them. "He cried: Florence!"

The passengers all about me had strained faces, their features were drawn and haggard. Some of the women, crumpled up in their steamer-chairs, were weeping. The Solitary Lady, clinging to the arm of the Pekin banker, could hardly stand upright.

"Where are they?"

In the thickening fog, it was becoming more and more difficult to follow the figure of the struggling lieutenant. At one moment he seemed to have disappeared completely. A groan escaped from the crowd. Then he reappeared farther away and a dozen voices cried out hopefully:

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"He's coming nearer!"

The director had torn the binoculars out of the hands of an Englishman and was sweeping the sea agitatedly. Where was Jacques?

"It's all over, he's drowned," someone muttered thickly.

But the director continued his search.

"No, there he is again," exclaimed his hoarse voice suddenly. "To the left of the buoy."

We strained our eyes to see: At that moment the whole world was concentrated for us in one black speck on a gray sea.

The engines and the turbines had stopped. A terrifying silence brooded over the ship. The deck was no longer vibrating under our feet. It was dead. Not a sound. The silence created so great a void in the immensity that we could hear the second-mate, a cable's length away, calling: "Lieutenant!" Despite the sea's swell, he was standing in the stern of the boat with his legs apart, erect as a mast.

"They must be there," murmured a marine.

In the dense night fog, we could distinguish nothing but a funereal star dancing on the water. The misty sea was concealing its drama. There was complete silence, except for the women's sobbing and the mate's whistle.

"Listen," someone whispered over our heads.

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Every ear was alert to catch the slightest sound. Fate would speak shortly. Life or death?

The life-boat had just touched the buoy. It seemed to stop, hesitate, turn about on itself. Had they been found? I was confused between hope and fear . . . At last I thought I saw some of the men bend over, pick up something from the water. My jaw trembled. I could not utter a sound.

"They've got both of them!" cried a marine.

"No, it's only the buoy," said another.

A silence more tragic than ever descended on us. At that moment, amid the complete calm, we heard the second-mate crying "Pull away!" The boat tacked about and made rapidly for the ship. We all grasped the meaning of the manoeuvre.

"They've got them! They're saved!"

The tension relaxed, and the crowd began stamping on the deck, calling to each other, and passing round the binoculars. Now we could already make out a group in the middle of the boat; the blue jacket of the second-mate, the white jacket of the lieutenant.

"Where's Largy?"

"He's lying down . . . The other one's supporting him."

When we learned that the boat would draw up at the stern, everybody made a dash for the second-class stairway. There was a crush in front of the

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bar. The director threw himself roughly into the mob, elbowing his way to the front. Some women, almost suffocated, screamed. "This way!" cried the marines, vaulting the handrail. I followed their example. The stern deck was already crowded, all classes mixed in one mass. Suddenly our progress was impeded; the soldiers and sailors were forming a lane beyond which we could not advance. They would bring him up this way. Standing on tip-toe, I could see the purser, some officers and a circle of blue-jackets all bending over. The powerful electric lamps had just been lit, throwing a circus glare over the scene. A livid girl beside me kept pulling at my wrists, repeating: "I want to see."

Suddenly there was a general movement to the other side. Following the crowd blindly I pressed over with them and saw the blond lieutenant being led away by a comrade. He was haggard, his hair plastered over his eyes, and his wet uniform sticking to his body. "Bravo" they cried, as he passed by.

Taking advantage of the crush and bustle and noticing that a gate was ajar, I made my way over to the other group. The officers and marines stood in troubled silence. They were looking at something at their feet. I thrust myself in and saw the doctor on his knees in a pool of water beside a body stretched out on the deck.

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The purser, whom I had jostled in my nervousness, turned his head to me and said simply:

"He is dead."

NEXT morning.

During the night I hardly closed my eyes; I arose with the sun and was the first on deck. Before me was the green mass of Cape Saint-Jacques, with its red-roofed houses. We were not far away now.

Had this dreadful destiny not overtaken him, he might now have been leaning on the rail beside me, his eyes wide with wonder, his glance already resting with affectionate pleasure on this new France of his adoption . . . But his body must be lying in the infirmary bed, with eyes closed, and hands crossed over his breast, just as I had seen him last night, between two nuns bowed in prayer.

In accordance with the director's wish, Jacques' body had been dressed in the most beautiful of his costumes—that of Werther. When I caught sight of the rigid corpse with flowers at its feet, the torso clearly outlined within the tight frock-coat, I was seized with a fit of trembling. Before my eyes rose the apparition of Marseilles. The nightmare had come true: here was my Stranger, very pale, surrounded by funeral wreaths . . .

The last evening had been one of utter horror. No

matter where you went you were pursued by the piercing screams of Florence who emerged from one painful torpor only to fall into a new hysteria. It sounded as atrocious as a slaughter-house. The shrieking was a ghoulish compound of all earthly remorse, supplication, terror. It made you feel like stuffing your ears, walling up your heart.

With the coming of morning she had calmed down, I was told, and her screams were no longer heard.

The passengers greeted each other cheerlessly, their faces drawn and wan. Those colonials who were preparing to disembark paid their farewells to those bound for China. Then the rest of us settled down again to talk of "him."

I dreamed of him, not as lying in his white cabin, but standing outlined against the forecastle, like the night-watch, like a carved figurehead at the prow, his high adventurous heart guiding our boat.

It seemed interminable, that ascent up the river between the flat, mangrove-covered banks. The soil here looked soft, like a gigantic sponge, filled with slimy water. As we followed the turns of the river, we saw the spire of a bell-tower, now to our left, now to our right, so that Saigon seemed to be concealing itself, setting up its cathedral in the four corners of heaven as a decoy. Gradually the river grew more animated: Curved junks, puffing freighters, and sampans, grace-

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ful as gondolas, rowed by a girl standing erect and dipping a languid oar in the water. The first villages appeared with their thatched roofs, some high smoke-stacks, hangers and derricks with massive chains, moored steamers. Our siren shrilled, Saigon . . .

In a minute our torpid vessel seemed to come alive. Cabin-doors opened and passengers lined the rail waving a greeting to their friends massed on the quay.

At last the gang-plank was lowered and the mob clambered aboard. Joyful cries, embraces—then the immediate query: “You’ve had quite a tragedy on board, I hear.” The whole city was already familiar with the news of the arrest and the suicide. Beside the colonials who had come to meet their friends there were the resident officials of the town and a great number of women, to whom the arrival of the boat came as a distraction. It was impossible to advance on the gangway. The porters stood still, the baggage piled on their backs. Through the mob glided some black-turbaned Annamites, laden with flowers.

“For Mademoiselle Florence Bernard!” called out the chief steward, threading his way through the knots of people. The manager of the troupe, who had arrived in Saigon last week, was not forgetting to advertise the star. In the crowd one recognized the heavily made-up faces of actresses. They had about

them an air of knowing importance; they did not dare to raise their voices. When their comrades appeared, they surrounded them and in little compact groups listened to Musette's whispered account of the tragedy. No one else said a word. Suddenly one of the women exclaimed:

"There's Manon."

Everyone was silent. Manon came down the staircase on the arm of Monsieur Pasquelin, for she needed support. Her face, buried in a handkerchief, was almost invisible. The Annamites, carrying the flowers, brought up the rear. Mechanically all the men took off their hats. She passed by me without a glance. Below on the coal-covered quay, Garrot had an auto drawn up, and opened the door.

"Really quite smart of him," the Pekin banker commented. "He's paying all the funeral expenses."

I nodded. The Fat Little Man came over to bid me good-bye; others followed, and finally the basso appeared, booted as if for hunting.

"Where's the Director?" I asked him.

He glanced about quickly, then, mysteriously:

"Sh-h!" he said in his hoarse voice. "He's lying in wait—for Prater."

The passageway was now filled mainly with coolies bent under the weight of trunks. The last passengers were going ashore. Yet I could not make up my mind

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to leave. It was only some silly scruple that prevented me from making a visit to the infirmary and kneeling before his bed. Yes, I should have done it . . .

At last I had almost decided to go ashore when a chambermaid, in a state of great agitation, ran past me, calling "Doctor!"

The doctor, who was chatting with someone on the stairway, turned in surprise. She gasped out a few words; brusquely, without vouchsafing any answer, he brushed her aside against the balustrade and set off in the direction from which she had come. In three strides he was at the stair-landing and dived into the passageway.

"The little Nicolai is dying," he cried over his shoulder. "She's just poisoned herself."

JOURNEY'S end . . .

We have been as in a deep sleep. Now the awakening has come, we rise from our dream to the life of everyday which awaits us. It is time to say good-bye, my chance companions, familiar shadows to whom I owe so much of sadness and of joy. Together we have discovered the world, shared the monotony of those interminable days which were to end so soon, tasted the ineffable sweetness of these ocean nights where even in your sleep you taught me something. And when I exclaimed with pleasure at the sight of

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some new port, it was not only with my own eyes that I admired it, but with yours, O shadow-like voyagers, transient friends, whose faces are already beginning to grow dim, like the mist on the window-pane formed by the breath of an idle boy.

At times, watching me at the rail busied with my solitary dreams, you said "He is bored." But you were wrong. I was watching your lives. Little by little, all things melted into one another, the reflections and the people, the shadows and the portraits. Each passenger came slowly to resemble the other image, sketched only in my imagination; our lives were subtly mingled and connected, the skeins of reality and illusion became intertwined, and then—arrival: We touched foot on shore and the charm was broken. Each of them reassumed their real faces, the little habits and worries of real life. The mist parted which had hid me from these creatures and the mirage vanished like smoke.

When a child I loved to be alone, as I was on the boat, and often, with nothing but a hollow straw and a chipped bowl, I used to amuse myself by blowing rainbow-colored bubbles which would always float off and burst before reaching the roof-top. They would disappear, leaving not a trace, not even a drop of water, as if made of nothing but light. Each time my mouth puckered with disappointment, yet I never

lost heart but went on blowing new bubbles, always hoping that at least one would be spared, so that I could follow it until it disappeared right into the sky. Since that time many years have passed and still I love to play at the deceiving game of imbuing with life these fragile bubbles—these small souls swaying at a straw's end. Perhaps God will see to it that a few of the bubbles I have blown will live . . .

Under the hard sunlight of Cochin-China, my characters seemed suddenly altered, like faces seen under the ghastly illumination of mercury lamps. Now they appeared as everyday human beings, like the actors one sees emerging from the stage-door after the performance, the paint removed from their faces, wearing an ordinary black hat and frayed coat. They may well say good-bye to me, but I cannot say it to them, for in my memory I will preserve their finer parts. The idea of a person that one forms in one's heart is so much more valuable than his real portrait.

"Aren't you going to applaud our singers at the Municipal Theatre?" the Fat Little Man asked me when I met him on the rue Catinat.

But why should I? Unknown to themselves, they too had already given me far more than they could now. Their voyage was ended but mine had scarcely begun. For many months now, amid their phantom

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faces, I could pursue my magic journey. Is not our past life a sort of second interminable voyaging in the great ocean of our memories? For our departure, we need but the breath of desire—or regret . . .

THE boat had long since sounded its farewell blast and had already emerged from the river. Perceiving one of the passengers in my path, I turned aside quickly to avoid speaking to him. For the reality of his words would have ruined the voyage of my mind.

Along the arroyos of Cholon where sleep the junks and sampans, I was with you, Garrot, in your calèche galloping to Shanghai, over the *Bund*; under the marvellous cocoa-trees of that Cambodian island, where everything recalled Penang—the same palms, the same red-earth paths, the same naked children,—I saw your living image, little colonial, with your arrogant face marked by Fate; and at our noisy dinner in the Chinese restaurant, was it not you, unconsolable Manon, whom I saw rising amid the shrilling of the violins on the balcony?

I have found them everywhere, my shadows. In the gardens of Hué so conducive to meditation, under the archways of Angkor where I was pursued by the prayer-song of the bonzes, and more than once in the cemetery of Saigon where so many worn stones bitterly recall the glories of yesterday. Gray flagstones

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where no one any longer kneels. Journey's end . . .

Do not seek amid those deserted paths for the cross of Jacques Largy, the stranger with the scar on his chin whom I met one rainy November morning in the Vieux-Port. There are no tombs for phantoms . . .

THE END



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